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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

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Monday, 17 December 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Adom/Mr. Ipo	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/1092)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/1092)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution.

Mr. Fedotov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Vienna.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite Mr. Serge Christiane, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1092, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

At today's meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Yamamoto, Mr. Fedotov, Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Haress.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: Today, I would like to focus on elections and peace and to touch upon the outcomes of the Geneva ministerial conference.

First, on elections, on 20 October, an estimated 4 million people in Afghanistan voted in the parliamentary elections. Next year, the people of Afghanistan will also make a critical political choice for their president. Those elections are essential steps on the path towards firmly establishing a representative democracy.

It has been almost two months since the parliamentary elections were held in 33 out of 34 provinces. So far, the results for 29 provinces have been released. Preliminary results show that 28 per cent of the newly elected parliamentarians are women, which is above the quota. We commend the courage and the strong will of the people of Afghanistan in having defied the threat of the Taliban to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

When we look at the elections this year, it is necessary to realize that the preparations and implementation, as well as the management of security, were primarily conducted by the Afghan people, with only assistance and advice from international experts. Compared to the elections in 2005, when 550 international experts were responsible for the implementation of the elections, this year only about 60 international experts participated in an advisory capacity. Also, the Government of Afghanistan bore more costs this year than in the past. The international contribution decreased from approximately $140 million in 2014 to $60 million this year.

In the area of security, the threats were real. There were more than 108 verified incidents, causing 400 civilian casualties, the largest number of casualties on a single election day since systematic records were kept in 2009. At the same time, it must be recognized that the total number of civilian casualties throughout the electoral period this year was on a par with that in 2014. We need to acknowledge the efforts of the national security forces, which managed the security primarily themselves this year without the significant international support that they had in 2014.

However, there were major and avoidable irregularities by the electoral management bodies in the preparations and implementation of the parliamentary

elections. It is clear that the electoral institutions need to make significant improvements before the presidential election. The irregularities in and mismanagement of the parliamentary elections will be unacceptable for the presidential election. We strongly urge the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission, as well as the Government, to take all necessary collective measures and to focus intensively in the coming months in order to complete the reforms so that the problems are addressed as they prepare for the presidential election in 2019. It is more important to conduct credible elections by allowing for reforms and sufficient preparations to take place rather than to conduct the elections without implementing the proper reforms from the lessons learned. The presidential election is critical to the future of the country.

As part of our commitment to helping the Afghan institutions deliver a credible presidential election, the United Nations, in response to the request by the President and the Electoral Complaints Commission, will recommend two international experts be appointed as non-voting members of the Complaints Commission. We will also reassess the roles of the international experts in the IEC and determine if more experts are necessary.

The Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations co-hosted a ministerial conference in Geneva on 28 November. Ninety-six countries and organizations participated. The international community reconfirmed that it will continue to assist Afghanistan in achieving self-reliance on the basis of mutual accountability between its development partners and the Government. The conference acknowledged the need for improvements in reforms, while recognizing the commitment of the Government to mutual accountability and a genuine reform agenda, in particular so as to counter corruption. The importance of the private sector and regional economic connectivity were underlined. A joint communiqué and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework were unanimously adopted at the end of the conference. Another key outcome of the ministerial conference was the assurance of continued international support in the post-peace phase. The international community expressed its commitment to continuing to provide assistance to Afghanistan in the event that a peace agreement is reached with the Taliban.

In the past 17 years, the possibility of a negotiated end to the conflict has never been more real than it is now. On the Afghan side, a peace plan was presented by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah at the Geneva ministerial conference. A team to negotiate directly with the Taliban was appointed. A senior advisory board representing a broader group of Afghan politicians to support the peace efforts was also announced. On 9 December, a new head of the secretariat of the High Peace Council was appointed. In Geneva, there was a dedicated meeting on peace, where participants reiterated that all international efforts, including those by regional actors and neighbouring States, needed to be in concert and aligned with the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts. The reiteration of that key consensus is timely and important, as a number of initiatives are under way to advance the process. For instance, the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan has been actively engaging with the various parties concerned. On 9 November, a meeting was held in Moscow, where parties from the region participated to discuss peace. Many countries in the region, including the neighbouring States, have also expressed their support for the peace process, which appears to be emerging.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is also encouraged by such developments. However, we understand that they are at a delicate stage, where political space must be allowed for the main actors to formulate their positions and determine how to react to the recent developments. The key next step would be for representatives of the Government and of the Taliban to meet, or at least to formally initiate what in mediation is referred to as talks about talks. We hope that the current momentum will bring those parties together so that they can begin to explore how they would address the many agenda points needed to reach a peaceful settlement.

In this forum, I have frequently spoken of the need to move from sporadic contacts to structured, formal talks. Efforts are under way to bring about that change. While fighting and talking are often a reality in the initial stages of a peace process, it is also the case that actions on the battlefield can have an impact on progress in any peace process. I would therefore urge all parties to the conflict to carefully consider how they can reduce the levels of violence, in particular the harm to civilians. I urge all parties to foster trust and to enable dialogue to take place. I call on the countries in the region in particular to contribute to creating an environment conducive to peace talks, thereby

allowing the people of Afghanistan to resolve their internal differences through negotiations. By moving from contacts to talks, we can begin to move from a logic of war to one focused on opportunities for peace. With that shift we can begin to envisage the benefits of a stable Afghanistan in the middle of a region full of promise and potential for growth, rather than continue to fear threats emanating from an unstable Afghanistan. As President Ghani has stated, there is a need to change the perception of Afghanistan from a site of danger or a battle ground to a platform of cooperation by location and strategic perspective. This is a moment of hope and possibility. Like all such moments, when adversaries begin to engage with one other, it is also a moment of risk. For the sake of a peaceful future for Afghanistan, these opportunities must be fulfilled and the risks managed.

UNAMA's Human Rights Unit has reported that there were more than 8,000 civilian casualties from 1 January to 30 September. That is the same level as that of last year. Child casualties remain high, with 2,136 recorded for the same period. Efforts must be made by all concerned to reduce the casualties. Almost 60 per cent of the casualties were caused by suicide attacks and ground engagements. The increase in the direct targeting of civilians by anti-Government elements this year is a concern for us. We also note the significant increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations. UNAMA also recorded 1,513 civilian casualties from suicide and other improvised-explosive-device attacks claimed by Da'esh/ISIL this year. That is a more than a three-fold increase for the same period last year. Given the way in which Da'esh/ISIL has expanded its influence in other parts of the world, we remain concerned about the threats from that group.

Before concluding, I need to mention the ongoing suffering that plagues a large proportion of citizens in Afghanistan. Despite progress on economic reforms, the country remains one of the world's poorest, and it is blighted by climate change. Of most immediate concern are people struck by drought and violence, and the suffering of 4.5 million people needs to be alleviated. The United Nations and its partners are issuing a humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan. Approximately $612 million is required for 2019, and I ask the international community for its immediate financial support to help people in need across Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fedotov.

Mr. Fedotov: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council.

As the Secretary-General's statement at the recent Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan conference highlighted, renewed efforts by the international community, together with regional support and engagement, are needed to overcome the serious challenges related to insecurity, poverty and the rule of law. Illicit opium and the criminal economy are among those urgent challenges, as recognized in the conference's joint communiqué, which calls for increased efforts to fight corruption and illicit narcotics. According to this year's *Afghanistan Opium Survey*, the overall area under cultivation remains the second-highest measured since the beginning of systematic opium poppy monitoring and recording, in 1994. The area under cultivation fell this year by 20 per cent as compared with the record level of 2017, and was accompanied by a drop in opium yield, but both decreases can be attributed to the devastating drought that Afghanistan has suffered. Eradication remained insignificant, falling to 400 hectares in four provinces, as compared to 750 hectares in 14 provinces in 2017. As a result, more than 5,000 tons of opium are potentially available for heroin production within and outside Afghanistan, which translates into more than 600 tons of export-quality heroin.

Continuing high levels of supply have brought prices down to rock bottom. The farm-gate value of opium decreased by 56 per cent compared to last year but, at $604 million, that still represents nearly 3 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. High levels of opium supply mean that there are a lot of drugs that will go to various destinations at a cheaper price. Moreover, Afghanistan remains an important source country of hashish. This year's *World Drug Report* found that Afghanistan had reported 22 per cent of the global total of hashish seized in 2016. Afghanistan is the first victim of that overproduction of drugs, which contributes to high rates of drug use in the country. Up to 200 tons of raw opium are consumed annually. A report by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics estimated adult drug use at more than double the global use rate. That poses a grave threat to public health and safety and hinders peacebuilding, economic growth and stability.

Balanced responses to drug supply and demand are therefore critical to supporting Afghanistan's efforts to achieve progress in combating corruption, money laundering and terrorism financing.

The Afghan Government has taken steps to increase resilience to illicit financial flows and foster good governance. Measures encompass banking regulation, the National Procurement Authority, the digitalization of many processes, including land titling and asset declaration, the anti-corruption law and strategy, the National High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption, the Anti-Corruption Justice Center, the new penal code, and the law on anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continues to provide support in all its mandate areas, including to address the Geneva mutual accountability framework priority area on anti-corruption, governance, the rule of law and human rights. UNODC is seeking to step up strategic responses in line with the peacebuilding and conflict prevention priorities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). That includes strengthening the interconnectivity of country and regional and interregional action to facilitate alternative development activities and access to international markets. Our Office in Kabul is supporting the Afghan Government in identifying common targets under a regional counter-narcotics strategy, which should be fully plugged in with existing coordination mechanisms.

I hope that we will be able to further strengthen progress, including through the implementation of the recommendations of the special session of the General Assembly on drugs (General Assembly resolution S-30/1), as well as through the forthcoming ministerial segment at the March 2019 session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. As ever, UNODC remains committed to supporting Afghanistan and the international community to address these shared challenges.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Fedotov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Umarov.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I appreciate this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), pertaining to Afghanistan and the Taliban, which I am pleased to do in accordance with paragraph 56 of resolution 2255 (2015). I am also grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their support of the work of the 1988 Sanctions Committee and continued assistance to its Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.

The main goal of the 1988 Committee is to deter the Taliban from continuing to support Al-Qaida and its affiliates and to deter Taliban attacks against the Government of Afghanistan, through the use of tools such as global asset freezes, global travel bans and global arms embargoes. At the same time, the 1988 sanctions regime is intended to support the peace and reconciliation process, including through the use of the delisting process and the process of granting exemptions to enable listed persons to engage in peace and reconciliation negotiations and other approved activities. For the credibility and effectiveness of the sanctions regime, it is essential that the relevant procedures be followed at all times, in particular the requirement that all listed individuals require travel ban exemptions, which should be submitted in a timely manner.

In its most recent statement at the Moscow conference on Afghanistan, organized and hosted by the Russian Federation on 9 November, the ending of the sanctions regime was the first demand made by the Taliban. International engagement with the Taliban throughout the year has concentrated on encouraging it to enter a political dialogue, primarily through the Kabul Process initiative. In addition to the initiatives launched by Uzbekistan and Indonesia, overtures were also made through the meetings of prominent religious clerics in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The leadership of the Taliban has stabilized under Haibatullah Akhundzada and his deputy Sirajuddin Haqqani. In its latest report (see S/2018/466), the Monitoring Team noted that the fighting season in 2018 would be at least as bloody as that of 2017. Unfortunately, that prediction has proven to be correct, in spite of the sanctions measures. The Taliban has pressed forward throughout the year with a ferocious military campaign that included the use of terrorist tactics, such as infiltration and targeted assassinations, kidnappings for ransom and suicide bombings. The Taliban was also successful in overrunning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) presence in northern Afghanistan after it was critically weakened by an intense campaign

led by Afghan and United States forces. The presence of ISIL in eastern Afghanistan remains contained through the same factor of combined Afghan and United States military pressure. Afghan security forces have struggled to repel repeated Taliban assaults on provincial capitals, but resolution remain optimistic due to the consistent support and assistance received from the international presence in Afghanistan.

The report of the Monitoring Team also noted that Al-Qaida remains closely allied to and embedded within the Taliban. There has been no change to that close relationship in recent Taliban declarations. The Taliban's finances originate from taxation on the narcotics economy and the illegal extraction of natural resources. The impact of the assets freeze on the Taliban's illegal activities will only be intensified once additional information is gathered on where the Taliban and its financial backers have invested their illicit proceeds from the narcotics economy and illegal exportation of illegally mined mineral resources, such as onyx marble, chromite, talc, gemstones and gold.

While there are many structures and frameworks in place for the implementation of the 1988 sanctions regime, the effectiveness of its implementation depends not only on internal, but also regional and international actors. The Committee would therefore like to encourage Member States to play a more active role in providing information that would help to maintain the sanctions list as up-to-date as possible and to assist the Committee in the implementation of the sanctions measures in order to enhance its effectiveness.

The overall effectiveness of the 1988 sanctions measures also relies on close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan and other actors in the region. I travelled to Afghanistan last year, and again this year as part of the Council's visit in January. I remain convinced that there is potential for greater use of the 1988 sanctions regime to deter the Taliban and support the peace process. Renewed efforts are also needed to list individuals and entities associated with the Taliban who are not yet on the sanctions list, but who carry out activities that are harmful to the peace and security of Afghanistan.

The Committee is keen to assist the Government of Afghanistan in making wider use of the tools offered by the 1988 sanctions regime. Throughout 2018, the Government of Afghanistan made overtures for peace with the Taliban, including the offer in February of negotiations without preconditions and the establishment of ceasefires in June and August. I thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his briefing to the Committee in October and for his regular support of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in its three visits to Afghanistan.

The Committee looks forward to continued close engagement with UNAMA, Afghanistan and other States in the region under the chairmanship of Indonesia in 2019.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Haress.

Ms. Haress: I speak today as a professional Afghan woman who has worked for decades to advance human rights, economic empowerment and democracy in my country. I am also a member of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution. I am here to brief the Security Council on the recent political developments in Afghanistan. My statement will address the recent and upcoming elections, the role of women and youth in the peace talks and the crucial importance of adhering to the constitutional framework in the current peace negotiations in order to protect the civil liberties of Afghan citizens and put my country on the road to democracy.

Afghan citizens defied threats of violence to participate in the long-overdue parliamentary elections of 20 October. Four million Afghans — women and men, young and old, urban and rural — came out to vote. Women, who went to the polling centres to fulfil their civic duty at great personal risk, constituted 34 per cent of voters. The participation of Afghan youth was also noteworthy — young women and men ran for office across the country, promising a more educated Parliament that would be less paralysed by corruption.

In a country scarred by ongoing conflict, the strong participation of citizens in this election was a significant achievement and an assurance that democratic institutions would be established, in accordance with the Constitution. However, the elections were also marred by significant challenges that must be addressed before the presidential elections in April 2019. The risk of violence before and on election day led to many polling centres remaining closed. At other

centres across the country, voters were killed or injured by militant attacks, roadside bombs or suicide bombers.

In addition to those grave security threats, there was widespread disappointment at the underperformance of the Independent Election Commission. Voters complained about technical and organizational problems, including the late opening of polling centres, the absence of electoral staff and materials and technical difficulties with the use of biometrics machines, which were intended to prevent fraud. Thousands of complaints have been registered with the Electoral Complaints Commission and other related monitoring institutions, which reflect the inability of those bodies to fulfil their obligations. It is vital that those challenges be addressed prior to the upcoming presidential elections.

Afghanistan has suffered from war throughout most of its recent history. Conflict has killed thousands of Afghans, destroyed villages and infrastructure and forced many to flee their homes. Peacebuilding is therefore an urgent priority. Positive developments, such as recent political agreements with the Taliban, have given many Afghans hope. However, those negotiations have also raised serious concerns regarding the meaningful participation of women and youth in the ensuing peace process.

Article 22 of the Constitution of Afghanistan guarantees the equality of women and men before the law. Women have seen major advances in recent years, including in basic access to education, health and work, and have significantly contributed to the development of post-Taliban Afghanistan.

However, despite the important role that women have played in bringing about social change in the country, gender inequality and numerous barriers to their meaningful participation persist. Afghan women suffer from violence, insecurity and lack of access to justice.

Given the history of the Taliban in Afghanistan, building sustainable peace while preventing the re-establishment of extremist rule depends on the meaningful inclusion of women. To ensure sustainable peace, those affected by the conflict must be an important part of the peace process, both in negotiations and in envisioning solutions. It is therefore vital that the Government engage civil society and ordinary Afghans from all walks of life so that they have a say in the future of their country and feel ownership over the decisions that will determine it.

The Government must ensure that any continuing obstacles to the participation of women in all spheres of public and political life are eliminated and that their inclusion is a non-negotiable priority. Women must have formal, substantive and specific roles at every level of the peace process. In addition, youth, the generation that will bear the consequences of the current peace process, must also be consulted, have direct access to the negotiating table and be included in the peace agreements. The Government of Afghanistan must also ensure transparency and keep citizens informed of any developments in the peace process.

The establishment of the Constitution in 2004 marked a significant break from Afghanistan's decades of war and lawlessness. Despite the years of conflict following the adoption of the Constitution, Afghanistan has made modest progress with regard to the rule of law, democratic governance and human rights, particularly women's rights. However, this progress has been placed in serious jeopardy by repeated suggestions that the Constitution be amended to accommodate the demands of the Taliban. Such suggestions raise concerns over preserving democratic governance, the protection of human rights and the separation of powers as enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

Afghanistan's Constitution allows amendments to fundamental rights only if the objective is to improve them. On election day, the Taliban attempted to intimidate people into staying home and deemed the democratic process a sham. It is therefore clear that the Taliban's intent to make amendments would not improve the Constitution but instead result in bartering away the rights and freedoms for which we have fought for 17 years. Making changes to the Constitution in order to negotiate peace is a red line we must not cross.

I therefore urge the Security Council to ensure that all peace negotiations or talks adhere to the framework of the current Constitution. Any compromise concerning citizens' rights and liberties would erase the hard-won gains of nearly two decades. The cost would be borne not only by the international community, but also by ordinary Afghans, as the hope they felt in the recent elections for a democratic Afghanistan would be cruelly snatched from them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Haress for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. We also welcome the presence of our worthy colleague, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto; Mr. Fedotov of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, from our country's civil society.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/1092), which provides a useful update on the overall situation in Afghanistan.

Today's meeting is being held against the backdrop of important developments. These include the renewed international partnership as affirmed by the Geneva Ministerial Conference and the adoption of the General Assembly's resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan, two weeks ago; new measures in the context of Afghan-led peace efforts, supported by regional and global partners; and sustained progress by our National Defence and Security Forces in their fight against regional and global terrorist groups, as well as enhanced economic cooperation by virtue of regional connectivity projects. Moreover, our parliamentary elections were, in spite of the challenges, another opportunity where our people, through ballots, took another step towards the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law.

This series of events provide a clear picture of the way in which our people have been turning the corner in their difficult journey towards stability and self-reliance. The United Nations played a crucial role in co-chairing the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan and supporting our parliamentary elections, for which we are very thankful.

In the area of security, our national security forces have, at great sacrifice, kept terrorist elements at bay throughout Afghanistan. The Taliban and affiliate groups failed to register real gains anywhere in the country. Attacks aimed at capturing territory, including provincial capitals, were foiled, with massive casualties in enemy ranks. Consequently, these groups, including foreign terrorist fighters, resorted to new levels of brutality, with increased numbers of cowardly terrorist attacks on population centres, leading to a dramatic increase in civilian casualties.

In the face of these atrocities, our people stand defiant in pursuit of peace and democracy. That commitment was made evident by the more than 4 million Afghans, over 45 per cent of registered voters, who came out on election day to cast their vote, despite all of the threats and attacks in various parts of the country. Every candidate and every voter was a target of the Taliban. As we await the final results of the parliamentary elections, our next focus is to address existing shortcomings to ensure success in the presidential elections currently scheduled for April next year.

Our people have embraced and were inspired by the international community's renewed partnership and support for a number of imperatives that are crucial to our ultimate success. Among the most important issues discussed in Geneva were our peace efforts, presented by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah in the context of the road map for peace, which was deliberated on at great length. We have fostered an unprecedented level of consensus on the imperative of peace nationally, regionally and internationally. Internally, an extensive consultative process culminated in the creation of a negotiating team and an Advisory Board that will provide strategic input on various aspects and stages of the peace talks once they begin. I just learned this morning that the Board held its first meeting today.

Regionally, a number of additional countries have stood behind our efforts, recognizing that the prospect of peace is now within reach. Internationally, we welcome the efforts of the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, which has brought new momentum to the peace efforts.

We welcome all forms of support for peace and underline that all such initiatives should be under the purview of Afghanistan's leadership of the process. Let me reaffirm to the Council that we seek a peace that is durable, with increased political, social and economic opportunities for our people: a peace that protects human rights, especially women's rights, and consolidates the gains of the past 17 years and a peace that keeps Afghanistan friendly to the region and to the world at large. Any misuse, abuse or instrumentalization of the peace process, by anyone, will not be tolerated by the people of Afghanistan, who have paid a heavy price over the past 40 years of imposed conflicts.

That notwithstanding, the imperative of genuine and tangible regional support for peace is of crucial

importance. We have always asserted that the Government of Pakistan has a particularly important role to play, given its leverage over key Taliban figures. Support for peace is one of the key commitments stipulated in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which entered into force in April. The Action Plan constitutes an important framework to effectively counter terrorism, help advance peace and avoid territorial violations. Nevertheless, progress on various fronts has thus far been elusive.

Last Saturday, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China gathered at the level of Foreign Ministers in Kabul for the second round of the trilateral dialogue platform, where discussions centred on tangible measures to build trust by addressing outstanding issues, mainly focused on countering terrorism to reduce violence in Afghanistan. With regard to peace efforts, we reiterated our request from Pakistan to do what is necessary to facilitate direct talks. With regard to security, we asserted that mutual trust and confidence are possible only when we see a reduction in violence and more tangible measures taken against terrorist elements. We hope to see visible progress in the coming weeks and months based on new commitments made, as well as the expectations of our people and the international community.

Afghanistan's worst drought this century has affected our people and lead to food insecurity, internal displacement and other drastic humanitarian implications. We appeal to the international community to help provide the support needed in order to alleviate this alarming situation, including through contributions to the emergency appeal launched by the United Nations. Amid the challenges facing Afghanistan, adequately addressing the humanitarian crisis should not be overlooked.

The Security Council visited Kabul under the Kazakhstan presidency in January and made a strong pledge to improve coordination and consensus on security and development in Afghanistan. What followed was a high-level ministerial meeting of the Council on building regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development (see S/PV.8162). That was seminal in setting a trend to approach Afghanistan's security from a development perspective. It reinforced a sharpening focus among a broad range of regional partners to advance numerous mega-projects, primarily under the Afghan-led Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and Heart of Asia Process.

Last week, in a historic event, President Ghani inaugurated the long-awaited Lapis Lazuli Corridor project, signed by Foreign Minister Rabbani and his Turkmen, Azeri, Georgian and Turkish counterparts in Ashgabat in November 2017. That landmark project reinstates the old trade route in its modern version, transporting famous Afghan products to Turkey and to European markets through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Moreover, since last year, we have operationalized air cargo corridors with India, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Europe, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and China, leading to a substantial increase in the export of Afghan products abroad. The Chabahar port remains an important gateway for providing commercially viable access to the sea, linking the Indian Ocean with Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond. In that regard, we appreciate the collaboration and flexibility of our strategic partner, the United States, in working with Afghanistan, Iran and India towards exempting the port from its sanctions. We also witnessed this year the implementation of the Afghanistan section of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, which will revolutionize the energy sector in those four countries.

Experience has shown that progress on all fronts — from development and security to economic prosperity and social development — in Afghanistan and elsewhere is best achieved in an atmosphere of amity, unity of purpose, mutual trust and cooperation for the common good. Afghanistan is a rare example of a mission on which various countries, and from different political blocs and security architectures, have converged for a collective purpose, namely, to ensure that Afghanistan is secure and stable and, through that, to promote regional and global peace and security.

We are pleased that that imperative is reflected in General Assembly resolution 73/88, on the situation in Afghanistan, adopted two weeks ago. It emphasizes that threats to stability and development in Afghanistan and the region require closer and more coordinated cooperation, as well as greater coherence and complementarity of approach between countries of the region and the international community, for the long-term peace, security, prosperity and sustainable development of the country. In that regard, it underscores the standing of Afghanistan as a platform for such international cooperation. That offers the surest guarantee for completing the mission upon which

we all embarked 17 years ago. In that objective, there must be no space whatsoever for seeing Afghanistan as a site of danger and a battle ground for proxy warfare, but rather as a platform of cooperation and cordiality by virtue of location and strategic perspective.

As we approach the new year, two issues are crucially important for our shared success. First, the political transition must be transparent, inclusive, embraced by the Afghan people and lead to the strengthening of our national unity and political stability. We look forward to the completion of the transition, which will give birth to a new and re-energized Parliament and Government. Secondly, in relation to the peace process, its outcome should provide the basis for durable peace, while preserving our many democratic gains across various spectrums and, above all, ensure that our country remains on the trajectory of progress, democracy and development. We count on the support of the Council and all of our international partners for our joint success.

Let me end with a note of thanks and gratitude to the outgoing members of the Council — Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden. We are particularly grateful to the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations for all its efforts as penholder on Afghanistan in the Security Council this year. We enjoyed a great level of collaboration between our two Permanent Missions on all relevant issues related to the Council's work on Afghanistan. We also thank Kazakhstan for facilitating the Council visit to Afghanistan in January and for playing a positive role in the peace, security and development of Afghanistan and the region within the Council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the new members of the Security Council — Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. We look forward to working closely with them during their tenure on the Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto and Executive Director Fedotov for their briefings. I also thank Ambassador Umarov of Kazakhstan for his annual briefing on the excellent work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). I would also like to express my gratitude to Ms. Haress for sharing her in-depth analysis and valuable recommendations, as well as to Ambassador Saikal for his insightful statement. I also wish to thank him for the kind words he expressed regarding our penholdership, which I shall credit my team for, as they did all the hard work.

In previous debates the Kingdom of the Netherlands has always stressed the need for an integrated and inclusive approach to the challenges in Afghanistan. With that in mind, I will focus on three issues: first, human rights and the rule of law; secondly, the elections; and, thirdly, peace.

This month we celebrated 70 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under Taliban rule, human rights were denied to most of the Afghan people.

Seventeen years since the end of brutal Taliban rule, a great deal of progress has been made, but many challenges remain, as our briefers pointed out. The Afghan people cannot enjoy many of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. We support the efforts of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to work closely with all Afghan institutions in overcoming challenges relating to those rights. That includes a justice system that is able to fully implement the progress the country has made in legislative reform and in constitutional provisions guaranteeing women's rights and the elimination of violence against women.

The security situation also constitutes a major obstacle for safeguarding fundamental rights. In that regard, we are concerned about the continuously high level of civilian casualties. The deliberate targeting of civilians by anti-Government forces is entirely unacceptable; we condemn it in the strongest terms.

An estimated 4 million Afghans contributed to shaping the future of Afghanistan by casting their vote in the parliamentary elections in October. They sent a very hopeful and powerful message. We hope the turnout for the presidential elections will prove to be even higher, with further increased participation by youth and women.

The parliamentary elections showed that improvements must be made to the electoral process. The Afghan Government and the Independent Election Commission will have to do their utmost to ensure that the presidential elections planned for 2019 take place in

an orderly and credible fashion. We strongly urge them to implement the lessons learned, and we call on the United Nations Development Programme and UNAMA to support the process. There must be improvements in the implementation of biometric verification, the training of election staff and voter education.

Also, the Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission both have their respective roles and mandates, which are separate yet interdependent. It is important that both institutions work together towards the common goal of organizing credible, legitimate and free and fair elections. All stakeholders across the political spectrum need to engage in political campaigning in a constructive and peaceful way, while upholding the highest democratic standards.

Peace is possible, and the moment is now. We urge the Taliban to reciprocate the offer of the Afghan Government to engage in direct peace negotiations. We commend President Ghani for his courageous leadership in preparation for negotiations. There is no alternative to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, supported by UNAMA and the international community.

Besides agreeing on new benchmarks for the important implementation of reforms, the Geneva communiqué once more reiterated the support of the international community for peace in Afghanistan. But peace should not roll back the progress made over the past 17 years, and can never come at the expense of the fundamental rights of all Afghans.

A new generation of Afghans is knocking on the door of a new Afghanistan — young, educated and talented women and men who do not want to return to the dark period of clerical rule. That was put on clear display by Ramiz Bakhtiar, the first Afghan youth representative to the United Nations, whom we invited to brief the Council in September (see S/PV.8354). Ramiz was elected as part of a joint initiative by Afghanistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was also reflected on 8 March (see S/PV.8199), when many members of the Council underscored the importance of the women and peace and security agenda in Afghanistan, a message that was reinforced by the fact that the majority of Council members at that meeting were represented by female leaders.

The voice of Afghanistan's people is clear: we need a workable peace deal. That will require political courage on the part of all the parties involved; it will require perseverance; and it will require the unity of effort of the Council. That unity of effort is something that we, as penholder this year, have consistently strived towards. By acting collectively and in an agile manner, the Council was able to give clear guidance and messaging on important developments in Afghanistan, including with regard to the peace process, the elections, the reform efforts and the many terrorist attacks affecting the daily lives of the Afghan people. Outside the Council, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to focus on those important themes and challenges. They need to be carefully addressed along the difficult road towards the sustainable peace and development that the people of Afghanistan so rightfully deserve.

Finally, I want to thank both Ambassador Saikal and Special Representative Yamamoto personally, as well as their respective teams, for their excellent cooperation over the past year. They can count on our continued support, including outside the Council.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like now to take the floor in my national capacity.

We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and personal contribution to achieving peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. We commend the work and dedication of his qualified staff. We are also grateful to Under-Secretary-General Fedotov for his comprehensive update, and we express gratitude to Ms. Ghizaal Haress from, the Independent Constitution Oversight Commission, and to my colleague the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, for their statements.

Today we are delivering our final statement as a non-permanent member of the Security Council under the agenda entitled "The situation in Afghanistan". As the President of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev, noted in his policy address to the Security Council, Afghanistan has been one of the main priorities during our work at the Security Council. We will continue to advocate for peace in our brotherly country, both in the General Assembly and regional organizations, and bilaterally after our membership of the Council ends.

During our membership in the Security Council we tried to focus the Council's attention on solving the Afghan conflict to establish peace in that country and to achieve progress and prosperity in the entire region. We organized two visits to Afghanistan, which was

already mentioned. The first was in October 2017 by the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999), concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities. The second visit was a Security Council visit in January. We also held a ministerial debate in January (see S/PV.8162) under the agenda item "Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development". Kazakhstan also initiated the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2, on Afghanistan and Central Asia. Those initiatives helped Security Council members better understand the current situation in Afghanistan and seek ways to solve it.

Kazakhstan welcomes the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, which were held at the end of October. It was an important milestone in the county's path to a more democratic State. At the same time, we express our concern at the increase in violence during the electoral period. We agree with the Secretary-General on the need to draw lessons from the electoral process and take appropriate measures during the upcoming presidential elections next year, both in terms of organization and security. It is important that all political stakeholders take responsibility for the process.

Kazakhstan fully supports the efforts of the international community to assist Afghanistan. In that regard, we welcome the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference and its joint communiqué. We will continue to support the Kabul process, regional structures and initiatives, as well as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

We commend our Central Asian partners for holding the Tashkent conference in March, as well as their efforts under the Moscow format. We also take note of the importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, in addition to the Resolute Support Mission. We co-sponsored resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan, which was recently adopted by the General Assembly. However, all the efforts of the international community must be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned in order to be successful.

Despite considerable measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan, the security situation remains volatile. We are concerned about the increase in the number of victims as a result of large-scale attacks by anti-Government forces and terrorists, including those using improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings. We recognize the serious problems with the high-level of civilian casualties, including women and children, as a result of air strikes. We are worried about the ongoing process of recruiting young men and women for terrorist organizations, as well as incidents of abductions and sexual abuse of children and attacks on schools and medical institutions, during the current reporting period. We welcome the joint efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UNICEF in addressing those issues.

We remain deeply alarmed by the growing presence of militants of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in northern Afghanistan. Despite the losses they suffered, especially in Jowzjan province, the threat posed to the Central Asian countries by their destructive activities remains significant. ISIL militants continue recruiting combatants, including from the countries of the wider region.

The drug problem persists in Afghanistan, even though the years 2017 to 2018 saw a decline in drug production as a result of the drought, per the latest report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in November. The drought affected many areas of Afghanistan and led to lower opium prices. In that regard, we believe it is important to offer farmers alternative ways of growing crops in order to reduce their involvement in the production and manufacture of narcotics in the future.

We are convinced that close economic cooperation among countries of the region and the integration of Afghanistan into the region will enhance stability and facilitate the Afghan reconciliation process. It will help create new opportunities for young Afghans and reduce their participation in organized crime and opium production, which, in turn, will have a positive impact on the situation in the country and in the wider region. We propose the promotion of an integrated three-pronged strategy for Afghanistan based on the following principles.

The first is strengthening the nexus between security and development. That means that investment in trade, transit routes, transport, and infrastructure

development should be seen as assets in promoting stability through enhanced connectivity. We are confident that projects approved by Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project power line and other planned railways and highways, as well as the Lapis Lazuli Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative, can lead to economic growth and prosperity, which would inevitably strengthen security and stability in Afghanistan. We note with satisfaction the improved World Bank ranking for Afghanistan's investment climate going from 183 to 167 due to the ease of doing business. That indicates progress toward the goals of the transformation decade and economic growth.

The second principle is revamping the regional approach. As threats today are transboundary, their resolution requires concerted efforts, which also happens to be more cost-effective than a country-specific approach. Central Asia is today able to help Afghanistan mitigate its challenges and increase its connectivity to the world economy. Pursuing a regional approach is the way forward to success.

The third principle is enhancing the role of the United Nations by improving the capacity of its agencies to coordinate and operate effectively as one United Nations. That requires a revision of practices both at Headquarters and in the field — a streamlining that is ever more important in the light of the diminishing development aid. We reiterate the importance of enhancing the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan and Central Asia through enhanced coordination and cooperation.

We also call on donors to increase their contribution to peace and development in and around Afghanistan. Kazakhstan is working on the establishment of a United Nations regional centre in Almaty to ensure coordinated support to the countries of the region in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, we urge the United Nations and its country offices to participate in that regional development strategy for the benefit of Afghanistan and the region. For its part, Kazakhstan intends to host a high-level meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on Afghanistan in 2019. The goal of the meeting is to develop regional partnerships and discuss the link between security and development.

Kazakhstan attaches particular importance to the role of women in conflict resolution. In that regard, we organized a regional conference in Astana in September entitled "Empowering Women in Afghanistan". The conference focused on sustainable economic growth in Afghanistan through empowering Afghan women, including in the business sector, and regional cooperation with an increased focus on education. The European Union, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan intend to launch a joint project in 2019 aimed at educating Afghan women in universities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The project will be based on the success of our own programme, with a total budget of $50 million. Thanks to that programme, around 1,000 Afghan students are studying in our universities.

Kazakhstan has made extensive investments in the development of regional transport infrastructure and continues to provide financial, technical and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan supports the principle of solving the problems of Afghanistan on the basis of mutual benefit. We will continue our work with regional and international partners to bolster stability in the region. I would also like to thank all the members of the Security Council for their fruitful cooperation on the Afghan dossier and express our hope that in the years to come we will continue to work collectively to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): The United States welcomes the outcomes of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, held three weeks ago, where the international community reaffirmed its long-term commitment to a peaceful, prosperous and self-reliant Afghanistan. At the Geneva conference, Afghanistan's international partners underscored their commitment to supporting the peace process. We also agreed on the need to look beyond peace negotiations to begin planning for the broader economic agenda required for lasting peace.

Underscoring the priority President Trump places on achieving a durable peace agreement in Afghanistan, Secretary of State Pompeo appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation to lead the efforts of the United States Government to bring an end to the Afghan conflict. In appointing Ambassador Khalilzad at this time, the United States is sending a clear message that we believe peace in Afghanistan is

possible. Now is the time for the parties to the conflict and the broader international community to seize this opportunity for peace.

While we are regularly reminded of the challenge security environment in Afghanistan and the heavy toll of the ongoing conflict on the Afghan people, we have also seen some encouraging signs that point to prospects for peace. We call on the Taliban to establish an authoritative team of negotiators to engage in inter-Afghan talks with the Afghan Government and other Afghans. To fully seize that opportunity, we welcome the decision taken by Afghanistan's partners — and reflected in the Geneva conference joint communiqué — to accelerate our collaboration on the socioeconomic requirements for peace. We urge all of our fellow donors, development partners and all stakeholders to prioritize the development on an action plan for a broad-based programme of post-settlement economic initiatives. That includes a return of Afghan capital, increased Afghan and foreign investment, job creation and enhanced regional economic integration. We thank the World Bank for its key role in working to make the plan a reality. Such a commitment requires broad-based collaboration and can be sustained only through effective burden-sharing among donors, Afghan stakeholders and the broader international community

In addition to lending support to Afghanistan's peace process, the United States also remains committed to supporting preparations for the presidential elections to ensure that they are transparent and credible. We were pleased to witness millions of Afghans exercise their right to vote in October's parliamentary elections despite the security challenges. In advance of the presidential election, we believe it will be important for the Independent Election Commission to address technical issues based on lessons learned from the parliamentary elections. We also note the importance of conducting credible investigations into allegations of electoral fraud. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays a critical role in supporting Afghanistan's electoral process and coordinating donor assistance. We urge the Mission to continue to prioritize its efforts to bolster the capabilities of the Afghan Election Commission to ensure that the presidential election is as credible and transparent as possible.

Regardless of which candidate ultimately prevails, the United States will remain committed to working with the Afghan people and the next Afghan Government on areas of mutual interest, including the fight against terrorism, promoting the rule of law and inclusive democracy, protecting human rights and increasing economic prosperity.

On security, the United States is deeply concerned that violence in parts of Afghanistan remains at unacceptably high levels. Despite the challenging environment, the United States and our NATO partners remain committed to strengthening the professionalization and ability of the Afghan security forces to protect the people of Afghanistan. Indeed, building that capacity in a way that prioritizes long-term sustainability and ensures that Afghanistan's security forces are inclusive and representative of the Afghan population is an essential element in laying the groundwork for long-term peace.

The United States also supports the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and encourages Member States to fully implement their sanctions obligations. Implementation is key for sanctions to be an effective tool for achieving peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

We also thank the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for again providing a valuable report on the status of opium production in Afghanistan. Despite the reduction in production in 2018, it is clear that the opium challenge in Afghanistan remains acute and will require dedicated focus in the months and years ahead. Our collective approach to addressing that complex challenge must remain broad. Direct efforts to scale back production, including eradication, must be part of the solution. At the same time, we must also focus on supporting Afghan law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, increasing access to evidence-based treatment for substance abuse, and perhaps, most importantly, supporting efforts to help Afghan farmers develop alternative, licit livelihoods. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to advance the implementation of its national drug control strategy and national drug action plan. We also ask our fellow donors to consider ways in which we can support those efforts.

The United States welcomes this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the long-term peace and prosperity of Afghanistan and to the Afghan people.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to sincerely thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Yamamoto. I would like to say how much we appreciate his update on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank Executive Director Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their briefings. I would like to point out how much we appreciate the presence and input today of Commissioner Haress and, as always, the visionary intervention by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal.

We welcome the renewed efforts towards a political settlement in Afghanistan. We fully support the invitation of President Ghani to unconditional peace talks and continue to urge the Taliban to engage constructively in talks with the Afghan Government. As we have heard, it is critical that the peace process continue to be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led and that it be inclusive. That means that it should include groups that do not traditionally have a strong voice in society, including ethnic minorities. The full and effective participation of women is fundamental. With two-thirds the population under the age of 30, youth must also have a central role in any agreement on the future of Afghanistan. Ms. Haress has eloquently set out why that all matters.

Strong and cohesive international support will continue to be needed. We urge all stakeholders, and especially Afghanistan's neighbours, to engage constructively. The Kabul process, under the leadership of the Afghan Government, is the vehicle that international initiatives should feed into. UNAMA has an important role to play in supporting current efforts, not least to help ensure that the peace process is as inclusive as possible and that its outcome upholds the achievements of the past 17 years with regard to human rights and fundamental freedoms, notably of women. The social gains of past years must be preserved and built upon. As one of Afghanistan's largest and most long-standing development partners, those are issues Sweden will be considering carefully as we calibrate our very substantial development cooperation with Afghanistan going forward.

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan last month was a welcome opportunity for the international community to take stock and assess progress. Reports that the anti-corruption framework is improving were encouraging, and it is now important to move forward with implementation. As stated in the communiqué issued at the Geneva Conference, the continued delivery of mutually agreed commitments will be essential for sustained international support. UNAMA also has a key role to play in supporting that reform agenda.

The timely conduct of inclusive, credible and transparent elections is imperative for stability and for strengthening Afghan democracy. The recent parliamentary elections demonstrated the commitment of Afghans to democracy, as millions turned out to vote across the country, braving obstacles and defying serious security threats. There were, however, serious operational and organizational shortcomings that put the credibility of democratic institutions at risk. It is therefore crucial that preparations for next year's presidential elections be improved at all levels. Responsible institutions must draw necessary lessons and address unresolved issues without delay. UNAMA's capacity-building efforts and technical assistance to the electoral process are vital. We also encourage close cooperation with UN-Women to promote the participation of women in the elections.

Cooperation with UN-Women and other actors is also important for the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, which contains a framework for women's active participation. It now needs to be integrated into existing national programmes, not least into their budgets. The progress made in strengthening the role of women over the past two decades must not be lost. Ms. Ghizaal Haress made a very compelling appeal on that issue today. It is not a side issue. It is central to the future of Afghanistan and powerful forces are working against it. UNAMA also has a critical role to play in those efforts, and we welcome the attention given to that issue in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1092), including the use of gender disaggregated data.

We share the deep concern of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General about the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The continuous attacks in Kabul and around the country, including targeted attacks on schools, religious minorities and journalists, have increased the number of civilian casualties, not least among children. Severe drought has caused food insecurity at emergency levels for 3.6 million people. Such climate-related food insecurity is also forcing people to leave their homes, thereby increasing the number of people displaced. Six million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance — almost double the needs compared to last year. The very clear call of the Special Representative

of the Secretary-General this morning on all parties to reduce the level of violence and protect civilians must be echoed by all of us here at the Security Council.

The humanitarian response must also be stepped up and closer coordination between humanitarian and development actors is needed to address root causes. Safe and unimpeded humanitarian access must be granted, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Attacks against humanitarian and development workers are unacceptable. We urge all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations and ensure the protection of civilians, as well as the protection of humanitarian and health-care workers and medical facilities. The Arria Formula meeting on Friday will offer an opportunity to discuss the protection of health-care facilities in more detail with a representative of Afghanistan.

As Chair of the local Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Kabul, we are concerned about the continued lack of accountability for the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, as well as the sexual exploitation of children. We welcome the leadership of UNAMA in more actively addressing the issue, as serious challenges remain.

Since 2001, Afghanistan has rebuilt its political system, State institutions, infrastructure and economy, with real improvements for its people. However, serious challenges of insecurity, poverty and the rule of law persist. The civilian toll of the conflict continues to be appallingly high. Finding a political solution is more urgent than ever. We may now have a rare opportunity and must not miss it. The renewed commitment of the international community will be important and UNAMA will continue to have a critical role to play. Sweden, as a steadfast supporter over three decades, will continue to support Afghanistan as it implements its reform agenda and takes other essential steps on its path towards development and inclusive, sustainable and equitable peace.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to sincerely thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing on the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092). I would also like to thank Mr. Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their briefings today. I join other colleagues in thanking Ms. Ghizaal Haress for her insights into the elections process. As other have said, it is very helpful to have her here as we discuss today's important issue.

I would like to start by congratulating every Afghan who participated in the October parliamentary elections, in the face of violence and intimidation. I think they reflect what the Afghan representative and the Dutch representative have both said. There is a new generation of Afghans knocking on the door of a new Afghanistan. Peace needs to be durable and must increase political, social and economic opportunities for every Afghan, as the Afghan Ambassador made clear. I think it is a message the Taliban needs to heard loud and clear from all members of the Council. The Taliban lives in an Afghanistan of the past, which no one wants to see restored. I think the Council can really help to make that message understood, loud and clear. To that end, we call on the Taliban to recognize that in the elections, the wishes of Afghans across the country to have a say in their country's future and their strong desire for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan have been heard loud and clear. In contrast, we are forced once again to condemn intimidation and attacks on civilians.

A number of speakers look forward to next year's presidential elections. It is important that the Afghan people get the transparent and credible presidential elections that they deserve next year. As today's debate and the report have shown, there are a number of technical and operational challenges that affect the elections and that need to be ironed out. Also, the lessons learned and the necessary reforms must be implemented so that those issues are resolved before the next presidential elections. In that context, I want to welcome the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for those efforts and its work to capture lessons learned. As part of that process, I would urge the Mission to consider what more UNAMA could do and what additional resources it needs to strengthen its support ahead of the 2019 elections. I would ask through you, Mr. President, for an update from the United Nations on that issue in the new year.

Turning to peace, recent developments include the efforts of the new United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Mr. Khalilzad, who I used to know in this Chamber. His appointment, the creation of a high advisory board for peace and the announcement of an official Afghanistan negotiation team offer a real opportunity to move the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process forward. To give it the best chance of success, it is vital that all other peace

efforts underpin Afghan efforts in a way that reinforces the indigenous progress. Any parallel process would simply risk undermining progress and empowering the Taliban. I think that General Assembly resolution 73/88, on the situation in Afghanistan, made clear that States Members of the United Nations want efforts to be driven by Afghanistan. Furthermore, they want all other efforts to reinforce the Afghan Government's efforts in that respect. It is critical that the international community give that its full support. It is also critical that the countries in the region give it their full support.

I want to take a moment to commend the efforts of President Ghani and his Government so far and to encourage them, as other speakers have done, to focus on inclusivity, particularly of women and youth, and on ensuring engagement at the community level in electoral and peace processes. I think that what Ms. Haress said about women's rights and human rights is absolutely vital in that connection. It is important that we think about how we might approach supporting Afghanistan's reform and development after any peace settlement, even if that seems to be some time away at this point.

Today's briefing by Ambassador Umarov on the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) reminds us of the important role sanctions play in the pursuit of peace. However, for a sanctions regime to be credible and effective, it is essential that relevant procedures be followed at all times. In particular, any request for travel-ban exemptions need to be submitted in a timely manner.

Others have mentioned the humanitarian situation. We join them in worrying very much about the dire situation, and the food insecurity issue should only add impetus to the peace process. We call on all partners to do more, not just to respond to the current crisis, particularly the ongoing drought, but to help strengthen the resilience of Afghanistan's most vulnerable people in the long term.

I think we all know that 2019 will be a critical year for Afghanistan. There is a significant opportunity for progress on its path towards peace and democracy. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting the Special Representative, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghan Government as they continue their important work to help the Afghan people, the Government and the peace process.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank you, Mr. President, for holding this meeting. We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Ambassador Khairat Umarov, as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), concerning the sanctions on the Taliban, and Ms. Ghizaal Haress for their important and comprehensive briefings. I also welcome the participation of our colleague Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, in the meeting.

I would like to take this opportunity to renew the support of the State of Kuwait to all efforts made by Mr. Yamamoto and the members of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), given the difficult situation there. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/1092) on the situation in Afghanistan during the past three months.

We hold our meeting today following the parliamentary elections held two months ago in Afghanistan. I am pleased to congratulate the Government and the people of Afghanistan for successfully holding those historic elections, where the Afghan people showed their courage in the face of challenges, threats and acts of violence by going to the polling centres to choose their representatives in the Parliament.

To accompany that historic achievement, the Security Council and the international community not only followed the elections, but we as members of the Council also welcomed and supported those elections through press statements. Last November, the Geneva Ministerial Conference was held to support Afghanistan, and reaffirmed without any doubt that the international community continues to stand with Afghanistan.

As this year is coming to an end, we must address the issue that concerns us the most in Afghanistan, namely, the peace and reconciliation process to end four decades of security and political instability, which have had an adverse impact on the life of Afghan citizens. The delicate political situation in Afghanistan requires that all wise people and political party leaders in Afghanistan give primacy to national interests over party interests. They must intensify efforts to ensure the success of upcoming presidential elections in April 2019 in order to guarantee a better future and a decent life for Afghan citizens after long years of war and conflict.

The Security Council must also continuously intensify efforts to support the political process and encourage Afghanistan to hold presidential elections as scheduled. In that regard, I join my colleague the representative of the United Kingdom in welcoming the appointment by the United States of Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. We also read with relief the content of the report of the Secretary-General on the effective and positive role of that appointment on revitalizing the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. We wish Mr. Khalilzad success in that vital mission.

We also express our relief for the efforts made by UNAMA field offices, which have supported peace initiatives in 11 provinces, including supporting the role of the youth in the peace process and settling sectarian conflicts.

In the area of security, we share the concern of the Secretary-General regarding the ongoing instability and the growing impact of the armed conflict on civilians, especially the continuous increase in the number of civilian casualties as a result of suicide and aerial attacks. In that regard, we renew our call to all parties to the conflict to honour their obligations by virtue of international human rights law and to immediately stop targeting unarmed civilians.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait renews its support to Afghanistan in achieving permanent peace and stability by reaching a diplomatically negotiated settlement. We stand with Afghanistan in its war against terrorism. We also believe that the diplomatic efforts must be accompanied by an investment in education. True reform in any society begins with a real investment in comprehensive education system that raises a promising and educated generation that is free from the clutches of sectarianism and contributes to building a safe nation for all. There is a famous Chinese saying on the importance of education that best describes my point, and with it I will end my statement today. If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; and if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank all the briefers — Executive Director Fedotov, Ambassador Umarov and Ms. Haress — for having shared their comprehensive analyses on the current situation in Afghanistan. Let me also express my gratitude to Special Representative Yamamoto for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092) as well as for all the work of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which is helping to promote political dialogue, foster economic development and enhance good governance.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered later in today's debate by the Chargé d'affaires of the Delegation of the European Union.

Let me make three points: on parliamentary elections, the development of Afghanistan, with special attention to climate change, and the security situation in the country, including the threat posed by landmines.

Poland welcomes all the positive developments that have occurred in Afghanistan in recent months. The parliamentary elections, conducted under difficult circumstances, demonstrated the strong commitment of Afghanistan's citizens, especially women and young people. The determination of millions of Afghans to exercise their civil rights was proof of the strength of the foundations of the democratic procedures used. We encourage the Afghan National Unity Government and all relevant institutions to continue their efforts aimed at improving the voting process during the upcoming presidential elections.

Poland has been a strong supporter of the nexus between security and development. In this regard, we took an active part in the Geneva Ministerial Conference, which expressed solidarity with the Afghan people and their Government in its efforts to promote prosperity and stimulate development. It also allowed Afghanistan to show progress and commitment in its pursuit of structural reforms. In this context, we welcome the commitment of the Afghan Government to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the progress made towards achieving Afghanistan's sustainable development goals.

Climate change affects the security situation of many regions, including the region where Afghanistan is located. Extreme weather events, droughts, desertification and water scarcity can lead to the escalation of local and regional conflicts and act as a threat multiplier. Therefore, we must emphasize the importance of mitigation and adaptation to climate change and strengthen countries' resilience in that regard. Proper climate-related risk assessments based on reliable data from the field and better management strategies are needed to effectively address these threats.

As a strong contributor to the NATO engagement in Afghanistan, we are deeply concerned by the recent developments in Ghazni province, which have been experienced as a heroic struggle between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and anti-Government elements. The deterioration of the security situation in the western areas of Ghazni province during November as a result of large-scale Taliban attacks is especially disturbing.

Poland encourages the Afghan Government to restore stable security conditions, which will allow the local population to live normal lives. We also confirm our commitment to supporting the Afghan forces through training and advisory activities in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission, led by NATO.

Despite the efforts undertaken by the Afghan authorities, the security situation strongly affects the civilian population. We are particularly concerned about the sad plight of children, who continue to suffer from the violence in the country. We welcome an enhanced focus on children and armed conflict. However, in order for us to see substantial and sustainable improvement, words must be translated into action. In addition, ensuring respect for humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law should always be an integral part of the United Nations Mission.

Poland remains concerned over the growing number of civilian casualties, including women and children, resulting from landmines and improvised explosive devices. Afghanistan is one of the countries most affected by this type of contamination. In this context, let me welcome the country's efforts aimed at addressing the threat posed by landmines and underline the role of mine action in supporting sustainable development.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Umarov for his dedication to the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). We believe that the Committee is a useful tool that can contribute to reconciliation in Afghanistan. However, we would like to underline that the procedures applied to its work have to be followed strictly by all States Members of the United Nations in order for the peace process to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

Finally, let me express our full support for the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan aimed at bringing about lasting peace and stability in the country. We encourage all parties to the internal and regional dialogue to strengthen their commitments in order to achieve that ambitious objective.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his very useful briefing, in particular on peace efforts and the electoral process. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for his briefing on the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan, a very important subject for France. I thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing on the latest activities of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), a sanctions regime whose effective implementation is of major importance in the context of ongoing peace efforts. Finally, allow me to express my special thanks to Ms. Ghizaal Haress for her insight into the current elections and institutional issues and the crucial importance of the political participation of women and young people. I will make three observations.

My first point involves elections. The holding of parliamentary elections in October illustrated the progress made in recent years. The elections, in which women took a large part, which is to be welcomed, showed the desire for peace of the Afghan people, who mobilized courageously, despite the threats and attacks. With a view to the 2019 presidential elections, the consolidation of a free, credible and transparent electoral process must continue. The weaknesses identified during the parliamentary elections must be corrected. In particular, the Independent Election Commission must continue to work to ensure the widest possible participation of the population in the elections and to create the conditions for a fair, free and transparent election. Indeed, it is trust in credible institutions and legitimate representatives that guarantees peace. France is very committed to ensuring that the European Union continues to support these efforts, as well as the United Nations and NATO, in order to help Afghan forces prevent and combat terrorism and all forms of violence, the objective of which is to prevent the Afghan people from expressing their free sovereign will.

My second point is about peace efforts. The seriousness of the security situation and the human cost of the conflict should encourage renewed efforts to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. The peace process must be inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-led, and must take the form of a negotiated peace with

the Taliban, with a view to achieving lasting stability. This requires both sides to express acceptable and necessary conditions for an integrated exercise of power within the institutional framework provided for by the Constitution.

Progress has been made, thanks in particular to the initiative of President Ghani, who recently proposed a road map. These gestures deserve to be commended, and France reiterates its call to the Taliban to respond to the peace offer on the table. It is also important that women and young people can participate in a direct and meaningful way. Finally, it is essential that all States in the region unambiguously support the process and that the international community's efforts be both concerted and not in competition with one another.

My third point relates to the fight against drugs. The decrease seen this year is only temporary. We remain concerned about the high levels of poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan. The continued drug trafficking fuels the Taliban insurgency and terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province. It is also a public health issue. Poppy cultivation and drug trafficking in the country threaten the lives of thousands of Afghans. We are aware of the magnitude of the task and the need for a collective approach in the context of the principle of shared responsibility. We count on the Afghan Government to continue the important efforts needed to curb the production and trafficking of drugs, with the support of UNODC and the international community, particularly as part of the Paris Pact initiative. The situation calls for an ambitious response and reforms in the areas of governance and the fight against corruption and organized crime.

In conclusion, allow me to thank the delegation of the Netherlands for its significant efforts and its clear and coherent stance on the Afghan issue during this year. We would also like to reaffirm France's full support for Afghanistan in this pivotal period and for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in support of the Afghan authorities. Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance that France attaches to the unity of the international community in support of Afghanistan. More than ever, we must remain united to support Afghanistan's path to peace, stability, democracy and economic and social development. Together with the international community, we reaffirmed that message of unity at the Geneva conference on 28 November, and we must now live up to it.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, member of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution, not only for their enlightening briefings but also for their tireless efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Afghanistan. We express our sincere appreciation to them.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea will look at the situation in Afghanistan from three aspects — national, regional and international — because we believe that genuine tripartite cooperation is the most effective inducement to achieve the peace and security to which the Afghan people aspire.

At the national level, unfortunately, security continues to be the key challenge for Afghanistan. Improving its security is one of the main requirements for achieving stability and long-term socioeconomic development. We continue to note with extreme concern the effects of the high level of violence to which the Afghan people, in particular civilians, are subjected. In that regard, we firmly condemn all deliberate and abhorrent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure that occurred during the reporting period. We urge the parties to comply with their obligations to protect civilians from harm. We maintain that all parties to the conflict must strictly fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law to take all possible steps in order to prevent attacks against civilian and civilian infrastructure, as well as the restriction of humanitarian access.

We would like to mention in particular the treacherous and barbaric terrorist attack in Kabul on 20 November, which claimed the lives of approximately 55 people and wounded more than 60. While we reiterate our condemnation and rejection of such acts in the strongest terms, we also once again express our deepest condolences to the Government of Afghanistan and to the families of the victims.

With regard to the political process, we share the view of Kabul and the Geneva conference that

the process must be led and fully owned by Afghans. By holding parliamentary elections in Afghanistan in such difficult and threatening circumstances, the Afghan people once again showed that they wanted to participate in the democratic process. In that regard, we wish to take this opportunity to congratulate all Afghan women and men on their courage in going to the polls in a climate of terror and constant threats to exercise their constitutional right to vote and to elect their representatives. The considerable increase in the participation of Afghan women by 8 percentage points as compared to the 2014 elections may seem insignificant. However, in the light of Afghanistan's history, we know that an effort to include women and also young people in the electoral process is being made. We call on the Afghan Government to step up that effort so that women also take part in all stages of the peace process. As Ms. Aleta Miller, UN-Women country representative for Afghanistan, said:

> "Not only does peace last longer when women lead and participate in peace processes, but also women have a right to participate in negotiating peace in Afghanistan. ... No decisions on the future of Afghanistan should be made without the full participation of all citizens affected by that future, and no peace process will be complete and lasting without the direct involvement of women."

Equatorial Guinea welcomes the significant progress made in the political, economic, social and governance reform agenda of the Government of Afghanistan, including the finalization of 10 national priority programmes, the implementation of far-reaching fiscal reforms and the promotion of women's participation in public life. Given our concern about the high level of violence against women and girls, as well as boys, in Afghanistan reported by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (see S/2018/1092), we hope that both the establishment of a technical committee to review the Elimination of Violence against Women Law of 2009 and the adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework will result, among other achievements, in stronger and rights-based legal protection from violence for all Afghan women and girls, as well as the prosecution of perpetrators of atrocity crimes against the civilian population, among others.

We take good note of the successful meetings held by Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad with various States in an effort to generate regional support for the Afghan peace process, as well as the outcomes of those meetings.

At the regional level, Equatorial Guinea understands that resolving a number of fundamental issues relating to economic development, security and stability in Afghanistan depends to a large extent on the neighbouring countries and their goodwill, firm resolve and willingness to actively facilitate national reconciliation and to put an end to violence in Afghanistan. We therefore attach great importance to promoting regional cooperation in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. We commend the efforts being made by some Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, through bilateral agreements to contribute to stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and to its social and economic development.

On the international front, we welcome the outcome of the Geneva conference on Afghanistan held from 27 to 28 November, jointly organized by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, which renewed the partnership and cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community towards peace, prosperity and self-reliance in Afghanistan during the Transformation Decade (2015-2024). We also commend the strong commitment of the international community to continuing to support the training, equipping, funding and capacity-building of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. We emphasize that, in order to deal with the threat of terrorism, there must be a collective commitment to fighting and overcoming that scourge in the context of the global counter-terrorism strategy.

In conclusion, we express our concern about the rampant increase in the production of narcotics. Narcotics provide significant financial support for terrorists in Afghanistan. We are aware of the connection closely linking cultivation, opium trafficking and terrorism. In that regard, we commend the counter-narcotics operations carried out by the Afghan Government, supported by the international community and in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which resulted in a high number of narcotics seizures, the arrest of narcotics traffickers and the closure of heroin laboratories, among other successful achievements. Accordingly, as a problem with ramifications at the national, regional and international levels, we encourage the international community to continue to assist the Government of

Afghanistan in its national drug control strategy and action plan.

I would be remiss were I not to conclude my statement by expressing well-deserved praise to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and his entire team, and expressing our appreciation to Ambassador Umarov for sparing no effort in his work as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank all the briefers for their important briefings today. As this is the last time during its term on the Security Council that Bolivia will be speaking in an open meeting on the subject that brings us together, I reaffirm my country's commitment to the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

On behalf of my delegation, I underscore the major democratic commitment that the people of Afghanistan have shown in holding the 20 October parliamentary elections, in which the people participated in a disciplined manner. Despite several incidents that could have affected security, they did not prevent Afghan women and men from going to the polls, as planned by the Independent Election Commission. We are pleased to note that, according to the Independent Election Commission, during the three days of voting, 4,812 polling stations opened and received an estimated 4.2 million voters. Turnout was highest in the provincial capitals. We stress in particular that, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092), 30 per cent of the voters were women.

Without any doubt, the history that is being rewritten by the people of Afghanistan is marked to a large extent by their willingness to build a democratic and secure State fully linked to its neighbours, the region of Central Asia and the rest of the world for the sake of its development. We believe, however, that, in order to achieve that goal, there needs to be a greater inclusion of women in decision-making at the Government level and in the economy of Afghanistan. In that regard, we are optimistic about the clear sign of democratic commitment shown by Afghan citizens, especially given that next year — more precisely on 19 April 2019 — presidential elections are scheduled to be held. We hope that the violent actions and terrorist attacks that blur the arduous path leading towards a consolidated democracy in Afghanistan will end.

We would be remiss if we did not express our deep concern about the high number of civilian deaths this year, the large majority of which resulted from terrorist attacks. The statistics provided by the UNAMA report on the protection of civilians show that there is a clear intention on the part extremist armed groups to target civilians in highly populated areas. We regret that there were 8,050 civilian casualties between January and September, which resulted in 2,798 deaths and 5,252 injured. In that regard, we categorically reject the violent acts perpetrated by extremist armed groups, which, through the use of improvised explosive devices, have led to 1,065 deaths and 2,569 injured. We were saddened that the violence, particularly during the 20 October parliamentary elections, resulted in approximately 425 civilian casualties — the greatest number of casualties in a single day for 2018. In that regard, we join the Secretary-General in his call on all parties to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to stop such attacks directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Bolivia welcomed the outcome of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan held on 27 and 28 November, which was organized by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations. It renewed the partnership and cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to achieve Afghan peace, prosperity and self-reliance. We also express our satisfaction with the communiqué that resulted from the Geneva Conference and acknowledged and reaffirmed the participants' commitment to an Afghan-led and -owned peace process with the full and meaningful participation of women.

Lastly, Bolivia stresses that there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. We will add our support to any initiative aimed at fostering an inclusive dialogue that is framed within respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of that country.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/1092) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Yamamoto, based on the report, and thank those others who briefed us on the topic.

Afghanistan continues to faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. The people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country. We remain very concerned by the deliberate acts of violence that have been directed against civilians, particularly throughout the electoral process, including the spike in attacks on electoral and related targets on 20 October, which exceptionally resulted in the highest number of civilian casualties recorded on a single day in 2018. Therefore, we condemn in the strongest terms those recent attacks. Once again, we take this opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the Government and the people of Afghanistan for their suffering and loss of innocent lives.

We reiterate our support for the proposal by President Ghani for direct negotiations with the Taliban, which has received broad and strong support from Afghans and the international community. We also take note of the international and regional communities' continued commitment and effort to support the Afghan peace process, including the various forms of engagement with the parties to the conflict. The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. In that regard, the renewed call made by the Afghan Government for direct peace talks with the Taliban is encouraging. However, that will not make any difference without a genuine response from the Taliban with regard to the peace process or engagement in direct peace talks with the Afghan Government without any preconditions.

We congratulate the Afghan people and the Government for the holding of democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame despite enormous security challenges. We also commend the people for their endurance in exercising their democratic rights amid high-level security incidents around the election areas throughout the country. Nevertheless, the number of incidents witnessed on 20 October is a matter of concern that could potentially undermine the electoral process. It could also overshadow the next presidential election, to be held in April 2019, if no substantive measures are taken on the early preparation days. We believe that building the confidence of the Afghan people in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all the relevant stakeholders will be key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the presidential elections. All Afghan stakeholders have important responsibilities in that regard, and we hope that they will demonstrate the necessary political will and commitment to doing their part for the sake of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, Afghanistan cannot effectively address its peace and security challenges. That is why the National Unity Government needs coordinated and comprehensive support from the international community if it is to advance its political reform and national development priorities, particularly as they are envisaged in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It will be vital to ensure that the international community sustains its engagement and delivers on its various commitments. In that regard, we welcomed the joint communiqué of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which acknowledged and reaffirmed the commitment of participants to an Afghan-led and -owned peace process with the full and meaningful participation of women. The joint communiqué also reaffirmed the international community's commitment to a post-settlement partnership with Afghanistan, including in the economic arena. It also underlined the importance of deepening regional cooperation in every area, including on the political, security, economic and social fronts, to the benefit of the whole region.

Finally, the ongoing engagement of the United Nations in support of the Afghan peace process, as well as for the country's social and economic development and in the areas of humanitarian issues, human rights and the holding of peaceful and credible presidential elections, remains very important, and we will continue to follow developments in that regard. UNAMA's efforts to promote and support initiatives for peace talks and reconciliation, as well as dialogue and support for social and democratic development, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership, remain very important. We therefore commend its active engagement with the Government, civil society and the people of Afghanistan, in line with its mandate.

Since this will be Ethiopia's last debate on this topic as a member of the Council, we would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for all

of their dedicated efforts in support of the people and Government of Afghanistan. We also commend the Netherlands for its role and efforts as the penholder on Afghanistan over the past year.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and for Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Fedotov's informative briefings. We also want to thank Ambassador Kairat Umarov for his important work as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). We support all of them in their execution of their various and complementary duties. We are also grateful for the briefings by Ms. Ghizaal Haress and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal of Afghanistan.

Peru continues to closely follow developments in Afghanistan, which we had the opportunity to visit at the beginning of this year. We want to commend the Afghan authorities and the millions of Afghan women and men who participated in the parliamentary elections on 20 October. We emphasize that the large-scale participation of citizens in consolidating and strengthening democracy is essential to combating violent extremism and building sustainable peace. In that regard, we would like to highlight the increase in the participation of women compared to the presidential elections of 2014, and we encourage more women and young people to participate in the political life of the country. In our view it is very important to ensure that women exceed 30 per cent of the total numbers of voters in the presidential elections to be held next April.

However, we condemn the terrorist attacks on the country's population and civilian infrastructure, and we are concerned about the serious political fragmentation that unfortunately continues to foster instability and insecurity in the country. In the light of the upcoming presidential elections, it will be crucial for political leaders and their supporters to conduct themselves maturely, avoiding any exacerbation of differences, fostering a spirit of democratic unity and a rejection of violence and safeguarding the intra-Afghan dialogue process in the quest for peace. We also want to underscore how important it is that the competent authorities work rapidly and transparently in counting and tabulating votes. In order to foster the people's trust, national institutions must show themselves to be effective in preventing and avoiding the problems that result from the kind of technical and logistical deficiencies that were encountered during the parliamentary elections. We also underscore the importance of fighting drug trafficking, promoting alternative development and combating the transnational organized crime that is yoked in an evil nexus to terrorist groups in Afghanistan, as Mr. Fedotov pointed out in his briefing this morning.

Finally, we wish to commend the efforts of international partners in assisting Afghans in their quest for the peace that has eluded them for so long. Peru believes that the support of the international community and neighbouring countries in Central Asia is crucial to advancing the intra-Afghan dialogue with a view to building sustainable peace. In that regard, and in conclusion, we want to commend the convening at the end of November of the Geneva Ministerial Conference, which reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to consolidating peace and promoting development in Afghanistan. We also pay tribute to the important work being done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations country team, in line with their respective mandates, as well as the work of the Netherlands as penholder on the Afghanistan issue.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his analysis of the processes currently under way in Afghanistan. We are also grateful for the briefings by Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ambassador Kairat Umarov, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Ghizaal Haress. We listened attentively to the statement by Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and we share many of the opinions in the latest quarterly report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092). For its part, Russia has the following comments to make.

The Russian Federation strongly and consistently supports the Afghan people in their desire for a lasting peace in their country. Russia and Afghanistan are traditionally linked through friendly relations that correspond to the national interests of both countries and contribute to the stable, multidimensional development of the entire region and the world generally. The international Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, in which Russia was a high-level participant, shows how important peace and stability in Afghanistan are to the international community.

We have been monitoring the tense and unfortunately continually deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, a trend that has also been accompanied by civilian casualties in the Afghan national security forces, and we want to pay tribute to the memory and courage of all who have died in the fight against terrorism. We are still seriously concerned about the strengthened position of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is filling its ranks mainly by recruiting foreign fighters with combat experience in Syria and Iraq. The militants remain true to their goal of increasing their numbers and strengthening their influence across the country. We are alarmed by the regular occurrence of major acts of terrorism in various cities in Afghanistan, including Kabul, whose victims are Afghan civilians, including women and children. The adherents of ISIL skilfully combine their ideological, propaganda and recruitment activities with their use of information and communications technology. The jihadists' expansionist aspirations, including in northern Afghanistan, are a genuine threat to the security of our Central Asian partners and Russia's southern regions. We want to emphasize that it is unacceptable to belittle or downplay the threats emanating from ISIL in Afghanistan. We await answers to our repeated questions regarding the transportation of ISIL militants in mysterious unidentified helicopters.

We are closely monitoring the evolving situation in the fight against drug trafficking. The drug threat represents a serious problem for the region, the world and Afghanistan itself. We remain committed to providing assistance to collective action to combat Afghan drug trafficking, including with the active participation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. We must maintain our joint policy of expanding the international community's efforts in the fight against this evil. The practical steps we are taking, including through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), are also in line with that approach. Russia remains willing to provide regular assistance to the global Paris Pact Initiative, established under the auspices of UNODC to comprehensively combat the illicit traffic in opiates from Afghanistan, to the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries and to the alternative development project in Badakhshan province. We intend to continue contributing to the training of narcotics police from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia. We hope that our Domodedovo joint project with Japan, which aims to create a canine unit service for Afghanistan, will be an important component of the war against drugs there.

We are concerned about the data in the Secretary-General's report on the increase in the number of civilian casualties, including as a result of the international coalition's activities, as well as the level of losses among the Afghan national security forces in the current season. We regret to have to conclude that the 17-year large-scale military presence of United States and NATO contingents has not led to the stabilization of the military and political situation in the country. The challenges have only got worse.

Afghanistan is on the threshold of important political events, including the upcoming elections. As friends of the Afghan people, we assume that they should constitute a step towards the country's unity and lasting stability.

There can be no military solution to the crisis in Afghanistan. The only path to resolving it is through the achievement of a common Afghan agreement reached by political and diplomatic means. We believe the negotiation process should be conducted under the leadership of the Afghans themselves. We affirm our readiness to provide all possible support to launching it. That was the goal guiding us when we convened a second meeting under the Moscow consultations format on 9 November. We regard that event as a major step towards developing a genuinely functioning collective approach to resolving the situation in Afghanistan and the start of direct inter-Afghan dialogue.

We emphasize the importance of the regional context for the Afghan settlement, and we want to particularly highlight the mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in that regard. We see good potential for enhancing cooperation on counter-terrorism and anti-drug efforts between Afghanistan and the CSTO and recognize UNAMA's important role in coordinating international assistance to Afghanistan.

What is happening in Afghanistan confirms that its accumulated problems require consolidated efforts. Close international cooperation is now more vital than ever, especially at the regional level, in order to transform Afghanistan into a land of sustainable peace, stability and prosperity. We are ready to continue working to achieve this goal.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-

General Yamamoto and Executive Director Fedotov for their briefings and their efforts. I also want to thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing. Over the past two years, under his capable leadership, the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) has done a tremendous amount of useful work, and China is grateful to him. I have also listened carefully to Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and Ms. Haress, the representative of civil society, and thank them for their statements.

China has been following the current political process and the security and humanitarian situations in Afghanistan very closely. In the wake of the parliamentary elections in October, the political process in the country has entered a new phase. Afghanistan's National Unity Government is committed to promoting socioeconomic development and maintaining peace and security. The Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan held in Geneva in November adopted a joint communiqué and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, reaffirming the international community's steadfast support to the country in all areas. The international community should now honour its commitment in earnest and continue to aid Afghanistan in the following four areas.

First, Afghanistan must be helped to maintain its political stability. While the parliamentary elections were held in October, the results have not yet been announced. As preparations for next year's presidential elections are under way, we hope that the country's Independent Election Commission can learn lessons and draw on its experiences in the parliamentary elections to strengthen the arrangements for the presidential elections. All stakeholders across the political spectrum in Afghanistan should strengthen their unity, consider the maintenance of national political stability a shared responsibility and resolve their differences through dialogue.

Secondly, the international community must help Afghanistan improve its security environment. The outbreak of violence on 20 October, the day of the parliamentary elections, claimed many lives and ended up becoming the deadliest day of the year. In the first nine months of this year, fighting inside Afghanistan resulted in a record number of civilian casualties. Statistics from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime also show that drug production in the country remains high. The international community should strengthen its coordination and cooperation with a view to effectively implementing the various Security Council resolutions related to these issues, and should support the work of the relevant subsidiary bodies, such as the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). It should also continue to support the Afghan national security forces in building their capacity to respond effectively to threats such as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking.

Thirdly, Afghanistan needs help in advancing the reconciliation process. The Government of Afghanistan recently again called for unconditional talks with the Taliban and reorganized its negotiating team. The international community should support an inclusive political process that is Afghan-led and -owned, back the Government's efforts to promote peace talks; encourage the Taliban to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible and give support to the Kabul process, the Moscow format and other international mechanisms with a view to making further progress.

Fourthly, we must help Afghanistan achieve self-driven development. The investment and business environments in Afghanistan improved in 2018. We hope that all the country's political parties will work together to advance its development in accordance with Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework and national priority programme. The international community should continue to help the Government and the people of Afghanistan improve their livelihoods, and should respect the Afghan people's independent choice of political system and development path. Regarding development, I would like to respond to my colleague from Kuwait, who made a reference in his statement to a Chinese proverb. China has another saying — that development is of paramount importance, and it is indeed of paramount importance to Afghanistan as well.

As a traditionally friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has always given support to its political process and its reconstruction and development. As Ambassador Saikal said, the second dialogue between the Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan was held in Kabul on 15 December with great success. The three sides reached a broad consensus and reaffirmed their joint commitment to realizing a comprehensive and inclusive political settlement as soon as possible, strengthening the momentum of improvement in the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, facilitating practical cooperation and connectivity by advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, expanding its

cooperation on counter-terrorism and jointly promoting regional security, stability and development. During the dialogue, the three sides also signed a memorandum of understanding on countering terrorism and issued a joint statement on the tripartite dialogue.

In order to help the millions of people who have been affected by drought in Afghanistan, China recently provided Afghanistan with more than ¥60 million in humanitarian assistance. We will continue to use the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' dialogue and the quadrilateral coordination group on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process — which consists of China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States — the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group and other multilateral mechanisms to provide support and assistance to Afghanistan in the relevant areas. China will continue to work with Afghanistan to actively implement the memorandum of understanding on jointly advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, facilitating its trade relations with other countries in the region and building its infrastructure, connectivity and socioeconomic development so as to contribute to the security, stability, development and prosperity of Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation thanks Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing on developments in the situation in Afghanistan. It also thanks Mr. Yury Fedotov and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, member of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution, for their relevant briefings on drug trafficking and on the strengthening of the rule of law in Afghanistan. I also thank Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, the representative of Afghanistan, for his extremely instructive statement.

My delegation commends the tireless efforts of the President Ghani and his Government to give the brave Afghan people peace, stability and development, which they have aspired to throughout so many years of suffering.

My delegation also welcomes the parliamentary elections held on 20 October, which mobilized many Afghans. Unfortunately, the elections were marred by deadly attacks carried out by the Taliban and the local branch of the Islamic State. These incidents negatively affected voter turnout. My country condemns this wave of violence, which once again reminds the Council of the need to pay sustained attention to the security situation in Afghanistan. We must recall that, 17 years after the fall of the Taliban regime, the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid remain major challenges, especially in provinces under Taliban control. My delegation therefore encourages the forces in the country to further strengthen joint operations with the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the provinces most affected by insecurity.

An election is scheduled for April that will be decisive for the future of Afghanistan — the presidential election. We hope that it will be transparent, credible and totally inclusive. In this regard, we note with satisfaction the commitment of the countries contributing to the Resolute Support Mission to maintaining their presence in Afghanistan and the pledges of funding for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces until 2024. Furthermore, my country calls for the implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which could help to resolve the security problem in the region.

Similarly, we welcomed the participation of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran in the Triangular Initiative meeting, which took place on 12 December in Islamabad, under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Initiative has yielded tangible results in the fight against drug trafficking through the sharing of information and simultaneous operations at the borders of the three countries. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire has always favoured dialogue as a means of resolving conflict and urges the Taliban to firmly commit, within the framework of the Kabul process, to direct peace talks without preconditions with a view to achieving a political settlement of the crisis and lasting peace in Afghanistan.

In the efforts to resolve the crisis, my country endorses the conclusions of a national conference on women's participation in the peace process, which was held on 12 December in Kabul. We believe that the greater involvement of women in the process would ensure that it has every chance of success.

With regard to humanitarian issues, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees, whose dignified and safe return to their areas of origin is made difficult by

the lack of infrastructure, poor access to basic social services, problems related to land management and food insecurity risks. In this regard, my delegation commends the outstanding work of the United Nations and its partners in helping more than 3.5 million people in need. We therefore urge the international community to maintain its financial support for the humanitarian plan for Afghanistan in order to provide the necessary assistance to the population. Côte d'Ivoire laments the restrictions on humanitarian agencies' access to vulnerable populations, as well as the attacks on humanitarian workers, which are a violation of international humanitarian law.

Côte d'Ivoire congratulates the Afghan Government on its commitment to the fight against corruption and the measures it has taken to stabilize the economy and improve business. My country also encourages the Government to pursue its efforts to combat drug trafficking, which is an important source of funding for the Taliban.

Côte d'Ivoire commends Ambassador Kairat Umarov for his work as Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and reiterates its full support for him.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on the States Members of the United Nations, and in particular the countries of the region, to ensure strict respect for the sanctions imposed on the Taliban. This would help to bring peace and stability to this country, which is devastated by a conflict that has lasted far too long.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In line with note S/2017/507, I remind speakers that they are kindly requested to limit their statements to five minutes, so that the Council can carry out its work in a timely manner. Delegations with long statements are invited to distribute them in printed form and to deliver an abridged statement in the Security Council, because we have a long list of speakers in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Usman (Pakistan): Millions of Afghans continue to suffer from prolonged conflict in their country. Instability caused by the vicious cycle of foreign military intervention and civil war has engulfed the whole region and impeded peace, development and progress.

Unfortunately, over the past year, we have not seen any sign of reduction in violence in Afghanistan. If anything, it has intensified. Thousands of Afghans have lost their lives owing to insurgent attacks, large-scale terrorist bombings and intensified air campaigns. We share the Secretary-General's concern about the worsening impact of the conflict on the population, as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan continues to record a high number of civilian deaths.

While the international community is committed to bringing the conflict in Afghanistan to a negotiated end, we finally see efforts to actually achieve this goal. The hope for a negotiated settlement was kindled by the observance of a ceasefire by all parties earlier this year. This was welcomed by the Afghans themselves, as well as their regional and international partners. This could prove to be a watershed moment in the long history of violence in the country.

The ceasefire achieved what military surges of the past could not — peace, albeit transitory. What Afghanistan now needs is for all parties to the conflict to commence negotiations for a sustainable solution. In this regard, we welcome the announcement of a negotiating team by President Ashraf Ghani, as well as direct negotiations between the United States and the Taliban. These meetings, and the recently held Moscow-format dialogue, represent promising openings. Pakistan also welcomes the most recent round of talks between the United States Special Envoy and the Taliban in Abu Dhabi earlier today. We hope that the dialogue leads to a sustainable peace process in which all parties show flexibility to make progress on a negotiated settlement of the war in Afghanistan.

Other than the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan has the most to gain from the restoration of peace and stability in our neighbouring country. The Government of Pakistan, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, is committed to extending all possible support to facilitate an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Pakistan envisages a future of close economic cooperation in our region, helping Kabul realize its ambition of becoming a regional hub for trade and energy. To this end, during the second round of the trilateral dialogue among the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan last weekend, our countries agreed to support reconciliation, development

and connectivity, security and counter-terrorism as the three areas of trilateral cooperation.

At the bilateral level, to support Afghanistan's economy and development, my country has taken tangible steps over the years. Pakistan and Afghanistan are working to improve bilateral relations through the recently agreed Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. Pakistan continues to facilitate transit of Afghan goods without any quantitative restrictions. Pakistan is the largest market for Afghan products, accounting for over 60 per cent of its total exports. The waiver of regulatory duties last year resulted in a 29 per cent increase in Afghanistan's overall exports to Pakistan. We have actively supported the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, which will not only address energy needs of the region but also generate significant economic activity in Afghanistan.

Over 50,000 Afghans have studied in Pakistani educational institutions and are now working in Afghanistan's public and private sectors, fulfilling their own dreams and the needs of their country. We have announced 4,000 fresh scholarships for Afghan students in Pakistani universities and professional colleges. We have hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees and are not shying away from what we consider to be our responsibility until their safe, orderly and voluntary return to their homeland.

Peace in Afghanistan is difficult but achievable. It is up to the Afghan parties to acknowledge that unconditional dialogue is the only path to peace. There is no alternative. They are the ones that need to make the tough but necessary compromises to get there.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I would first like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Ghizaal Haress for their insightful briefings. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) for their briefings.

My remarks today will cover three themes: regional and international support for Afghanistan, women's and girls' rights and the elections.

First, on regional engagement, I would like to recognize the success of the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which is a testament to the world's continued support for the people of Afghanistan. Special Representative Yamamoto and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, contributed to the success of the Conference. I thank them. The Conference highlighted the solidarity of the international community as we stand with the Afghan people and the Afghan Government in their efforts to bring peace and prosperity to their country. Furthermore, we urge the Taliban to respond to the Afghan Government's offer of peace and to negotiate peace for the people of Afghanistan.

I am also glad to note the successful adoption by the General Assembly on 6 December of resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan, which demonstrated the international community's enduring support for Afghanistan. At this time, I want to highlight the important role of Afghanistan's neighbours in supporting peace efforts, improving regional interconnectivity and promoting economic development opportunities with Afghanistan.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize Canada's support for the meaningful inclusion of Afghan women and girls in decision-making processes. As you said so well yourself, Mr. President, in your statement on behalf of Côte d'Ivoire, we know that no country can achieve true peace and prosperity without the full participation of all of its citizens, especially women and girls, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. That is why we have partnered with Oxfam Canada on the Amplify Change project, which supports the participation of Afghan women and girls in decision-making processes. To date, Oxfam has helped 680 women and 600 men better understand and safeguard women's legal rights. That work has also included religious and political leaders from the provinces of Balkh, Nangarhar and Herat, and uses both an Islamic perspective focused on sharia laws and secular laws.

Canada commends President Ghani for reaffirming, at the Geneva Ministerial Conference, that the Government of Afghanistan intends to continue to defend the constitutionally protected rights of Afghan women. Canada also commends the leadership of First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani on the empowerment of women and girls. Leadership at the top is making a difference. The success of many women in recent parliamentary elections may be related to those

efforts and leadership. So far, 28 per cent of elected parliamentarians are women — a number that is higher than in many democracies and higher than in my own country, Canada. In our last federal election in 2015, only 26 per cent of elected parliamentarians were women. Of course, that did not prevent Prime Minister Trudeau from forming the first gender-balanced cabinet in our history. But still, it shows that the people of Afghanistan ought to be congratulated.

(*spoke in French*)

I would like to congratulate the Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission on its gender equality policies and on its concrete efforts to increase the political participation of women. I also note the tremendous efforts of civil society actors, such as the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan and the Afghan Women's Education Center, for their courage in promoting the rights of women and girls, as well as those of ethnic and religious minorities, during the electoral process.

We also welcome the work of the United Nations and other partners to distribute ballots in rural areas ahead of the elections. We encourage the Afghan national authorities to continue to actively address irregularities and to promote and protect the rights of those in rural communities, especially women candidates and voters, to participate in public affairs. Their inclusion is essential to the integrity of the elections.

Afghanistan recently went through an important democratic process during the October parliamentary elections. I commend the bravery of the Afghan people who, defying intimidation and threats of violence, went to the polls to cast their votes. I also recognize the courage of the Afghan elections officials and the security sector personnel who supported the elections process. We look forward to the presidential election in 2019, and we hope that the lessons learned from the October parliamentary elections will be applied to the presidential election.

(*spoke in English*)

The next presidential election, to be held in 2019, is crucial to the future of Afghanistan. It is important that lessons be learned from the recent legislative elections. Shortcomings must be addressed. Some initiatives must be taken to ensure that the presidential election is free, fair and credible. All stakeholders have an important role to play to ensure that the country is ready. The Independent Election Commission, the Electoral Complaints Commission, the Government, the political parties, civil society and the international community must all come together to ensure that Afghans can vote freely and in security. Canada stands ready to help.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): At the outset, let me too thank all of the briefers. In particular, I would like to thank Ambassador Yamamoto for his very profound briefing. I also want to highlight the briefing delivered by Ms. Haress.

These are once again crucial and testing times for Afghanistan. We are entering what has been called the second half of the transformation decade. Germany will remain very active. Germany is the second-largest donor and troop contributor to Afghanistan.

Let me briefly turn now to the Geneva Ministerial Conference, held under the auspices of the United Nations, which we found to be very timely and important. It sent a clear signal of international commitment to Afghanistan and, at the same time, highlighted the expectations of Afghanistan. As others have mentioned, it also demonstrated that this is a moment of opportunity for progress towards peace.

With regard to international commitment, on the one hand, and expectations, on the other, they were both reflected in the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, which set both a clear sign of international commitment and the expectations of the Afghan Government with regard to reforms. I acknowledge the efforts mentioned by the Ambassador of Afghanistan, which we must commend. In particular, I want to highlight what he said with regard to economic connectivity and all the different initiatives he has been taking. I also note the need for reform, to fight against corruption and to build functioning institutions in Afghanistan, as mentioned by previous speakers.

On the elections, I would like to echo what was said very eloquently by my Canadian colleague with regard to encouraging signs, including the high-level of participation in the elections and the number of women who have been elected. I think that that is remarkable, and we must commend the courage of each individual voter who went to the polls despite the threats that they all faced. There were shortcomings, which have been noted, and we would urge the Afghan Government

to take an in-depth look at those. Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Haress both said that those are irregularities that are unacceptable for presidential elections.

On the peace process, there have again been encouraging signs and there may be a real opportunity to achieve a substantial peace process. We welcome the efforts of the Afghan Government, including the appointment of a peace negotiation team, and we understand that its advisory board met for the first time today. We hope that the Taliban will do likewise, heeding the call from the Afghan people to come to the negotiating table.

With regard to negotiating, I can echo only what has been said by many, including my Canadian, Swedish and Dutch colleagues, namely, that the peace process has to be inclusive. Women, children and ethnic-group minorities have to participate. Of course, as a result of the peace process, we need a guarantee that what has been achieved in the country, in particular with regard to women's rights, is not redressed.

On women, peace and security, from my perspective let me also highlight the importance of peace processes being inclusive. Women need to be included in peacebuilding at all levels. Studies show that peace processes that include women as witnesses, signatories, mediators or negotiators lead to a 35 per cent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting longer than 35 years. Strengthening the role of women in peace processes is therefore of the utmost importance.

The drought and climate change that have been mentioned by several speakers, including Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Fedotov, are devastating. The Chinese Ambassador also just highlighted the contribution that China has made to alleviating the situation. Climate change affects us all, but in a country hit by violent conflict and poverty, its consequences can be even more devastating. We must not let that happen. As a Security Council member, Germany will put an emphasis on the security effects of climate change. The situation in Afghanistan is a case in point, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1092) has shown.

Finally, Germany, together with Indonesia, will take over the role of co-penholder on Afghanistan. We know that we have some big shoes to fill. I would like to commend the Netherlands for its wonderful work and engagement this year, as well as Kazakhstan for the work in the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). As I said, they are tough acts to follow. Germany will continue to stand by our Afghan friends in the Security Council, the General Assembly, the European Union and, most importantly, in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Stefanile (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his excellent report (S/2018/1092) and to Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing. We also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their briefings. Further, we extend a warm welcome to Ms. Haress. Her vibrant call to preserve the integrity of the Afghan Constitution is a powerful and important message.

Those briefings clearly illustrate the complex juncture at which Afghanistan lies, starting with persistent security challenges, which continue to exact a heavy toll in terms of civilian victims and widespread suffering among the Afghan population. Every day, the National Unity Government and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF)courageously fight terrorist and extremist violence that seeks to disrupt efforts for peace and stability. Italy remains committed to strengthening ANDSF capacities in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission.

We welcome the outcomes of the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which allowed us to take stock of the progress made in Afghanistan's reform process and reaffirm the mutual commitment between the Afghan authorities and the international community to fostering a future of peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the country. An important outcome of the Geneva meeting was also the shared awareness that not all of the reform goals have been fully achieved. We refer here mainly to the fight against corruption. With a view to the pledging conference that will take place in 2020, the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework clearly outlines the areas where there is scope for further progress.

With the same objectivity, we recognize the importance of the first parliamentary elections held in late October under Afghan leadership. Those elections attest to the tenacious will of the Afghan people,

especially of the many women who participated despite an intimidating climate and terrorist threats. At the same time, taking note of the organizational, procedural and security-related difficulties that emerged, we believe that those elections should also function as a blueprint of lessons learned and help to ensure that the upcoming presidential elections are held in a credible and transparent manner.

The only viable solution to the conflict lies in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. There is an urgent and unambiguous yearning for peace among the Afghan people, as well as broad international consensus on this point. Those factors have allowed for a window of opportunity, enabled by the unprecedented offer President Ghani made to the Taliban last February, to stay open. Although the brief ceasefire during the Eid Al-Fitr festivities was not a forerunner of further positive gestures by the Taliban, prospects for a negotiated peace in Afghanistan have not been this tangible since 2001, also owing to the positive impact of international efforts.

Italy expresses its full support for those diplomatic initiatives, which, in full accordance with the Kabul process, can lead to concrete progress in opening the way towards peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. We underline, in that context, the positive contribution that can be made by the main international stakeholders, and especially regional partners, in creating the conditions for peace.

Lastly, it is essential that the negotiations for peace, which cannot be achieved at any price, involve every component of Afghan society, especially women, children and minorities, on the basis of a fully inclusive approach. Women, in particular, must be able to play an active role in negotiations and ensure that their rights, enshrined in the Constitution, and the civil and social gains of the past 17 years are protected and further promoted.

I wish to conclude by expressing Italy's sincere appreciation for the clear commitment to this issue by the Afghan Government, as confirmed by President Ghani in his new road map for peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan.

Mr. Mahmadaminov (Tajikistan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations for convening today's debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his valuable observations and the important work being carried out by UNAMA in Afghanistan under his leadership. I would also like to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Fedotov, Ambassador Kairat Umarov and Ms. Haress for their briefings, as well as the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement.

Of all the Central Asian countries, Tajikistan shares the longest border — around 1,400 kilometres — with Afghanistan. We have very close cultural, historic and linguistic ties with that brotherly country, and that very fact makes it difficult for us to watch, from the other side of the Amu Darya, our Afghan brothers and sisters suffer because of the instability of the past several decades.

I think that there is general consensus in the Chamber on the following three main messages: first, terrorism and extremism cannot be eliminated by the use of military force alone; secondly, the Afghan peace process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned; and thirdly, without stability in Afghanistan there will be no stability in the Central Asian region, nor will it be possible to achieve progress on social, economic and environmental issues. My delegation also fully subscribes to those points.

In spite of some progress, many challenges continue to exist in Afghanistan, the resolution of which requires additional efforts from the international community. In my statement, I would like to share some of our perspectives on how to address those challenges by utilizing the capacities and opportunities of neighbouring countries.

Terrorism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking could undermine the commitment of the region, as well as that of Afghanistan, to bring about sustainable development. If not addressed, they will become major obstacles on our way to the timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We express our great concern about the recent strengthening and activation of terrorist groups and their activities in the northern part of Afghanistan. In our view, to effectively counter threats emanating from terrorist groups, strengthening international and regional security cooperation is therefore crucial.

In that regard, Tajikistan's law enforcement agencies have been actively engaged with their colleagues from other Central Asian countries and Afghanistan in information-sharing, law enforcement and border control, in the frameworks of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Development Programme, UNAMA, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other organizations.

We welcome the outcome of the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which led to renewed partnership and cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community with regard to Afghanistan's peace, prosperity and self-reliance midway through the transformation decade from 2015 to 2024.

As the host of the High-level International Conference on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism in Dushanbe, on 3 and 4 May, we believe that particular emphasis should be placed on the importance of intensifying counter-terrorism cooperation and coordination, as well as information-sharing, border security, legal cooperation and the exchange of best practices. The Conference was particularly timely in the current context of strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia, and we firmly believe that, based on our experience and the successful outcomes of the Dushanbe Conference, such dialogue should be continued. To that end, Tajikistan intends to host yet another high-level event on this issue next year and invites all stakeholders, in particular the United Nations and its relevant bodies, to join us in order to take joint and effective measures to counter terrorism and extremism.

In our opinion, developing comprehensive agricultural programmes and irrigation systems and providing electricity supplies in rural areas will ensure decent living conditions for the population and could significantly contribute to the decline of drug production in Afghanistan, as well as to solving the drought and food insecurity problems. Tajikistan, with its vast hydropower potential, could be very helpful in that sense by meeting the industrial demand of Afghanistan by providing it with stable and affordable electricity.

In that regard, enhancing cooperation to implement regional hydropower projects is critical. It should be mentioned that Tajikistan exported approximately 1.4 billion kilowatt hours of electricity to Afghanistan in 2017 and plans to increase its export to over 1.5 billion kilowatt hours in the future. The construction of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity transmission line project and various hydropower plants, in particular the Sebzor hydroelectric power plant in the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan, as well as the construction of gas pipelines and transport corridors, would further contribute to the improvement of the living standards and well-being of the Afghan population.

For many years, the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, has been actively advocating in different forums for more coordinated action and regional approaches to bring about prosperity and development in Afghanistan. To that end, we consider the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Istanbul Process, the chairmanship of which Tajikistan will assume in 2019, to be important platforms for establishing regional cooperation.

To facilitate trade with Afghanistan, my country, with the assistance of the international community, has built five bridges and established two free economic zones along its border with Afghanistan, which has significantly increased trade between the two countries. Our cooperation with Afghanistan in the spheres of education and the training of personnel are both effective and fruitful. Hundreds of Afghan students are currently studying at the universities of Tajikistan. My Government has also decided to grant up to 1,000 educational quotas to citizens of Afghanistan by 2025. We will continue to render assistance by training Afghan military and border guards, doctors and other specialists.

To conclude, let me reiterate the readiness of my Government to further assist our brotherly country, Afghanistan, in overcoming the aforementioned challenges in order to ensure well-deserved peace, stability and development in the country. Moreover, I wish them every success in holding a peaceful, inclusive and transparent presidential election. They may rest assured that Tajikistan will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan as it implements its reform agenda to gain peace, development and self-reliance during the transformation decade.

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to once again remind Council members that speakers are kindly requested to limit their statements to a maximum of five minutes. Delegations with longer statements are asked to distribute paper copies and deliver a summarized version to the Council.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on Afghanistan. I also wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing and the tireless efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Let me further express my appreciation to Ms. Ghizaal Haress, Mr. Yury Fedotov and Ambassador Kairat Umarov for their briefings, as well as Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal of Afghanistan for his valuable input.

Japan welcomes the successful convening of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, held in November, co-hosted by the United Nations and the Government of Afghanistan. Japan attaches importance to the fact that, in addition to reform and development, reconciliation was formally put on the agenda for the first time. Japan welcomes the formulation of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework and will support the efforts of the Afghan Government to move forward with its reforms.

Japan would like to pay its deepest respects to the citizens of Afghanistan for their determination and courage in casting their votes in the parliamentary elections of October, in spite of the difficult security situation that they faced. We also express sincere condolences to the victims of terrorist attacks and their bereaved families. Free and fair elections are the backbone of democracy, and Japan expects that the Afghan Government will review the results and challenges that surfaced at the parliamentary elections and take every possible measure for the upcoming presidential election, scheduled for next April.

Improving security is fundamental to the peace and reconciliation process moving forward. While we have recently seen efforts in the international arena regarding peace in Afghanistan, Japan continues to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Japan is highly concerned about the severe drought affecting Afghanistan, where millions of people are facing serious food insecurity and a humanitarian crisis. The Government of Japan has recently decided to extend new assistance of $13 million in response to that devastating natural disaster. Moreover, understanding the agricultural sector and rural development as key sectors for Afghanistan's development and essential for enhancing resilience to droughts, Japan provided approximately $15 million this year to improve irrigation infrastructure and water management.

I welcome the fact that the briefers and speakers have stressed the important role of women and youth in Afghanistan. In that connection, Japan has decided to provide approximately $17 million to promote the *Maternal and Child Health Handbook* and provide immunization against infectious diseases, including polio. I believe that those projects will contribute to saving the lives of many Afghan children, who will lead Afghanistan's progress in the future.

We are at an important and decisive juncture as we near the halfway point of the transformation decade. We should build on what has already been achieved, and Japan stands ready to participate in and discuss with the international community and, of course, the Afghan Government, the way forward in order for Afghanistan to become truly self-reliant.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Fedotov, for their briefings, as well as the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/1092).

At the outset, let me reiterate our heartfelt condolences for the loss of innocent lives during the latest heinous terrorist attacks that took place in Kabul. We once again strongly condemn those cowardly acts of terror. Turkey stands in full solidarity with the Government and people of Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

Afghanistan stands at a crucial juncture in terms of its political, security and economic transformation. As the country approaches the midpoint of the transformation decade, it continues to face significant and complex challenges. The highest number of civilian casualties recorded by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the six-month period between January and June attests to the volatile security situation.

Turkey has been active in supporting the security of Afghanistan since 2001. We have pledged $60 million for the period 2018-2020 in support of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. As one of the Resolute Support Mission framework nations, we will maintain our support for Afghanistan both bilaterally and through NATO.

Under those precarious circumstances, the engagement of the international community remains vital. We were pleased to see the continued support at the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan. We thank the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA for convening the Conference, which provided a crucial moment to renew partnership and cooperation for Afghanistan's peace, prosperity and self-reliance. It is now imperative that we live up to the commitments made.

Turkey's development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan has been one of our most comprehensive development programmes. The total amount of our aid exceeds $1.1 billion. More than 1,000 projects have been completed all around the country. We have pledged a further $150 million of development assistance for the period 2018-2020.

The Secretary-General indicates in his report that insecurity, violence, poverty and unemployment continue to heavily impact the young people of Afghanistan. We share that assessment and dedicate the largest part of our development assistance to education in Afghanistan. So far, more than 700,000 Afghan children have received education in 85 schools built by Turkey. We attach particular importance to the education of girls so that they can reach their full potential and contribute to the stability of their country. Habibe Kadiri High School for girls, which has operated in Jowzjan since 2008, has changed the lives of hundreds of girls and their families. The ongoing project of the Turkish-Afghan University of Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi in Kabul will constitute another significant step in the field of higher education for young Afghans. We also fully support regional connectivity projects, such as the Lapis Lazuli transit agreement.

The Afghan people need peace, and that can be reached and sustained only if it is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. We congratulate the Afghan Government on undertaking key reforms on good governance, the macroeconomy and private-sector development. A more focused approach is now needed to implement long-term strategies.

With the ceasefire during Eid Al-Fitr and the parliamentary elections, held on 20 October, Afghans once again displayed their desire for peace and democracy. Improvements to the electoral system and the reinforcement of the fight against corruption will further consolidate democracy across the country. The upcoming presidential elections will be crucial for Afghanistan to achieve stability, security and prosperity.

Enhanced cooperation and increased dialogue among the countries of the region are also necessary. In fact, it is the region itself that has the greatest role, interest and responsibility in establishing and sustaining a secure and peaceful Afghanistan. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is a stunning example of regional ownership for cooperation. The next ministerial conference of that Process will take place in Turkey in 2019. As a long-standing friend of the Afghan people, Turkey will maintain its contributions to the country with a comprehensive and integrated approach.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Yardley (Australia): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto and all of today's briefers.

We congratulate the people of Afghanistan on their courage and determination during the parliamentary elections on 20 October. Despite violence, intimidation and disappointing administrative failures, the Afghan people turned out to vote in impressive numbers and make their voices heard. Australia urges the Government of Afghanistan to quickly address the deficiencies that are evident in the electoral processes and ensure that the 2019 presidential election is credible and transparent and fully reflects the will of the Afghan people.

Just as the October elections demonstrated the desire of Afghans to participate directly in the governance of their country, their call for an end to the conflict and ongoing suffering is loud and should be heard. President Ghani's determination to take the lead on peace through the Kabul process and his offer to the Taliban of negotiations without preconditions demonstrate a strong desire for a new chapter dedicated to peace. Australia understands and shares that desire and welcomes those initiatives. Australia believes that the Kabul process should form the framework for the

pursuit of peace in Afghanistan and the basis for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process.

We were pleased that the international community reaffirmed its support for Afghanistan and for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process on 28 November, at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, and on 6 December, with General Assembly resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan. Australia particularly welcomes the efforts of the United States to build on the Afghan Government's initiatives in 2018 and bring the parties together in meaningful negotiations.

We are deeply disappointed that, to date, the Taliban has refused to engage with the Afghan Government and has continued its bloody campaign against the Afghan people. We call on the Taliban to end its violence, enter genuine negotiations with the Afghan Government and bring relief to the Afghan people. In the meantime, Australia will continue to stand with its allies and partners in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission and work with the Afghanistan security forces to overcome the challenges they face. Australia also recognizes that Afghanistan has made important progress, especially on economic and institutional reform. We encourage continued progress, especially against corruption, to ensure that more resources reach their intended destinations.

The Afghan people face natural, as well as man-made, challenges. We have seen this year how drought has affected many Afghans. In March, we pledged $39 million over three years to support vulnerable groups affected by conflict and displacement, bringing Australia's humanitarian response to Afghanistan to $89 million since 2014. During the Geneva Conference, we also announced an additional $5 million contribution to provide emergency assistance to almost 1.4 million Afghans on the verge of acute famine.

Finally, we wish to again record our appreciation for UNAMA's work in Afghanistan. At a difficult time of record levels of violence, we nevertheless look forward to a point when UNAMA can help Afghanistan enter a new era of peace and reconstruction.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): First of all, I would like to commend you, Sir, for convening today's quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Yuri Fedotov, and Kazakhstan Ambassador Kairat Umarov for their informative briefings. I would also like to thank Ms. Ghizaal Haress for sharing with us her perspectives on current developments in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan traditionally pursues towards Afghanistan a policy based on the principles of mutual respect, equality and full support of the Government elected by the people of Afghanistan. Given such circumstances, the engagement in the process of finding an ultimate solution to the current conflict in Afghanistan and the maintenance of good-neighbourly relations with that fraternal nation are among the main foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Currently, Uzbekistan actively participates in various international negotiations formats on Afghanistan, such as the Kabul process, the Moscow format, the International Contact Group, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan contact group and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's principled position arises from its firm belief that the central Government in Kabul should be the main party to the peace process. As mentioned by all speakers today, only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process can lead to a peaceful settlement of the current conflict.

Uzbekistan strongly supports the international community's efforts in facilitating the process of resolving the situation in Afghanistan. In that regard, I would like to cite remarks made by the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, at the Tashkent-hosted International Conference on Afghanistan held in March:

> "We stand ready, at any stage of the peace process, to create all necessary conditions for organizing on the territory of Uzbekistan direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement".

In order to support a reconciliation process in the country, the international community must invest in the economic future and social stability of Afghanistan and its young people.

For its part, Uzbekistan is rendering practical assistance to Afghanistan in rebuilding its social and

economic infrastructure. In Tashkent, we supported projects, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) and the following initiatives in the areas of transport, communications, energy, trade and education.

First, with regard to the construction of a railroad corridor from Mazar-e-Sharif to Herat, the implementation of the project will provide employment for up to 30,000 Afghans and allow Kabul to generate annual profits from the transit in the amount of between $400 million and $500 million. In addition, the construction of the road from Mazar-e-Sharif to Peshawar, via Kabul, remains urgent.

Secondly, the construction of the electricity power transmission line Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri will allow for an increased electricity supply from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70 per cent, or up to 6 billion kilowatt hours, per year. The power transmission line will switch Kabul to the unified energy system of Central Asia. Moreover, the electricity power transmission line Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri may become an important part of the CASA-1000 project.

Thirdly, with respect to the training of Afghan specialists, at the moment the educational centre for training Afghan citizens is operating successfully in the town of Termez in Uzbekistan. One hundred and thirty Afghan young men and women students attend the centre. In the future, we plan to increase the number of students up to 250. We call upon all countries to unite their efforts in establishing a special international fund to support education in Afghanistan, which was proposed by the President of Uzbekistan.

Fourthly, with regard to the promotion of trade with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has opened an international logistics centre in Termez, with a customs terminal to assist with an increasing export-import and transit cargo flow. Uzbekistan has also created a free economic zone — the Termez Cargo Centre — at the border with Afghanistan, where we plan to establish industrial production lines to manufacture the ready-made items necessary for the projects and programmes that are currently being implemented in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has also opened trading houses in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, with the aim of facilitating trade between the two countries so as to gradually increase volume to $1 billion annually. We have also established a direct air link between Tashkent and Kabul to provide support for bilateral exchanges. An Afghan Consulate recently opened in Termez in order to facilitate exchange between the two countries.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Uzbekistan is making consistent efforts to assist in advancing the peace process in Afghanistan. Therefore, in Tashkent we are strongly committed to continuing close collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan and other stakeholders in that quest.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate. We also thank the Special Representative of Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, and the other briefers for their briefings, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for sharing his perspectives on the recent developments in his country.

While the situation in Afghanistan continues to cause concern, there have also been several positive developments of significance. Millions of Afghans — women and men — who turned out to vote in the recently held elections, despite the Taliban threat, demonstrated their courage and strong desire to work for a better future by exercising their democratic right. It was a bold refusal to be cowed by the terrorist groups. We commend the National Unity Government, the Independent Election Commission and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which made sure that the elections went ahead despite the serious challenges and threats. Democracy is clearly taking firmer root in Afghanistan. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General stated earlier, those elections were the first to be completely run by Afghan authorities since 2001. They indeed mark an important milestone in Afghanistan's transition to self-reliance.

Many Member States attended the recently concluded Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan last month, thereby reaffirming the commitment of the international community and the United Nations to Afghanistan. Ten days ago, the General Assembly also reiterated its support to the cause of Afghanistan through its adoption of resolution 73/88. However, that is clearly not enough.

Even as the reports of the Secretary-General have continued to stress that the violence and terror in Afghanistan show no signs of abating, terrorists are

now attacking places never imagined before, including hospitals, schools, mosques and even mourners at funerals. Sadly, one-quarter of all terrorism-related deaths in the world were caused by attacks in Afghanistan last year. Despite all the signs of the deterioration in the security situation, the international community and the Council, with all its tools, have simply been unable or unwilling to deal effectively with the source of the problem.

The Council's actions against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant can serve as a template for action against terrorists and their supporters in Afghanistan. The illicit narcotics, illegal mining and other criminal industries controlled by those terror groups are stealing the resources of the Afghan people and funding ever more violence. The sanctuaries and safe havens provided to those terror networks for years are well known. The activities of the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Da'esh and Al-Qaida and its proscribed affiliates, such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaysh Muhammad, must be stopped. The Security Council sanctions committee, which refuses to designate the new leaders of the Taliban or to freeze the assets of its slain leader, is f: lling short of what is expected of it by the Afghans and the international community. Based on lessons of the past, we in New York are aware that peace in Afghanistan is tied to peace and security in the entire world.

Even as the challenges of security, peace and development continue to mount, there has also been considerable progress over the past 17 years, especially in the areas of promoting education and health care; protecting the rights of women, children and the marginalized; improving governance and reforms; generating livelihoods and moving Afghanistan towards self-reliance.

India has age-old historical, cultural, civilizational and economic ties with Afghanistan. We are working closely with our Afghan partners in implementing development projects and will continue to do so in this transformation decade. Building reliable connectivity for landlocked Afghanistan is a key component of our regional partnership. We are mindful to ensure that all such projects respect State sovereignty and territorial integrity and are based on universally recognized international norms, transparency and principles of financial responsibility, ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards. It is in that spirit that we are engaged in various connectivity projects in the region, including the Chabahar Port project and the direct India-Afghanistan air freight corridor, which have been successfully operationalized. We will continue to build on the gains made and to work with all those who share the spirit of helping Afghanistan without conditions.

We support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled inclusive peace and reconciliation process that promotes and protects unity, sovereignty, democracy, inclusiveness and prosperity of Afghanistan. Any meaningful progress towards sustainable peace requires the cessation of terrorist violence, renunciation of links with international terrorism, respect for the rights of common Afghan people, especially those of women, children and minorities. We hope that the courage, resilience and determination of the Afghan people can be matched by those of the international community in doing what needs to be done on its part to bring peace to that war-torn country.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Christiane: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 Member States.

The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/1092) and Special Representative Yamamoto and the Ambassador of Afghanistan for their statements.

The EU highly values and welcomes the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Special Representative Yamamoto to support peace and development in Afghanistan. The EU also welcomes the outcome of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, where the EU was represented by High Representative Federica Mogherini and by the European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica.

Four weeks ago, the EU adopted Council Conclusions on Afghanistan, reaffirming the EU and member States' long-term commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan in their efforts towards peace, security and prosperity. We acknowledge the current momentum for peace in Afghanistan. We consider the coming months to be key for advancing the

peace agenda. To that end, at the Geneva Conference the EU High Representative made a concrete offer to support peace in Afghanistan, including but not limited to helping the Government to make the peace process more inclusive; supporting post-conflict reforms, including security sector reform; providing incentives for ex-combatants; having the EU as a guarantor of the peace process; and supporting cross-border trade, infrastructure and connectivity. We are currently working with the Afghan Government to develop that offer into concrete actions.

The EU firmly believes that any peace process should include mechanisms to represent the interests of all Afghans, women and minorities in particular. Civil society is also a key actor and can provide important perspectives, not least those witnessed here today. We support a possible peace deal. The EU will stand strongly behind the protection of human rights. Peace must not come at the cost of progress made over the past 17 years. All international efforts to bring peace are welcomed. However, in order to guarantee full Afghan ownership of an eventual peace process, direct peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban cannot be delayed much longer. The international community needs to bring all negotiation formats under the Kabul process.

I would like to address three points. The first point is about reforms. At the Geneva Conference, the international community took stock of the implementation of the reforms by the Government of Afghanistan and agreed on new benchmarks for the future years. The EU signalled once more its firm commitment to that endeavour. It announced a support package of €474 million for Afghanistan, including €311 million for the State and Resilience Building Contract for the years 2018-2021.

It is, however, of utmost importance that Afghanistan focus not only on the adoption, but also on the implementation of reforms. In that context, the EU notes the finalization, ahead of the Geneva Conference, of the development policy framework consisting of the 10 national priority programmes linked to the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, as well as the progress made in their implementation. Notably, progress has been made with regard to a more enabling environment for business and promoting private sector growth, public finance management reforms, trade facilitation, and security sector reforms. We encourage the Afghan Government to continue those reforms.

The fight against corruption needs also to continue and deliver concrete results, which will help maintain and increase people's confidence in Afghan institutions. The same applies for the protection of human rights, with particular focus on areas such as the elimination of violence against women, the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the protection of children and the prevention of torture and ill treatment. In that regard the EU would like to emphasize the need to implement the law on the elimination of violence against women and to adopt the child protection law, which has been, deplorably, recently rejected for the fourth time in the Afghan Parliament.

The second point I would like to address is about elections. The EU concurs with the United Nations assessment and finds it positive that elections took place in October and that many Afghans — including women and young people — actively participated despite security threats. However, we note that the polling was negatively affected by substantial organizational and technical difficulties, as well as suspicions of large-scale fraud.

For the preparation of the presidential elections, the coming months will be essential to address those shortcomings and draw lessons from them so as to ensure credibility and transparency and to preserve the inclusivity of the political process. There is no need to say that strong and swift measures that will ensure the safety, transparency, accountability and credibility of this ballot need absolutely to be taken.

The coming elections and the peace process are two separate things. The international community must remain firm in supporting both a Kabul-led peace process and presidential elections that are transparent and strengthen the legitimacy of the resulting Government. It is also important that the presidential elections take place on time. To that aim, the EU is gladly providing electoral assistance to the tune of more than €18 million, both through the United Nations Development Programme Electoral Support Project and through a separate project to help reduce the vulnerabilities of the election process. We are ready to work with the international community, especially the United Nations, on the identification of how best to further support the Afghan electoral process.

The third and last point I would like to address is about security. The EU remains deeply concerned about

the security situation in the country, particularly by the high level of civilian casualties — more than 8,000 since the beginning of the year — and grave violence affecting children, as documented by UNAMA. All parties should comply with their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of the civilian population, including women and children, and protect and respect humanitarian and medical personnel, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.

Considering the scope of the humanitarian needs and the dire situation of internally displaced persons, humanitarian principles must be respected and upheld. The vital role of humanitarian agencies and the humanitarian space must be preserved in order to meet the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable persons. Conflict-related violence must not destroy another generation's livelihood, homes or property, or displace families and limit access to education, health care and other services.

With regard to migration, we would like to assure the Security Council that the EU continues its comprehensive dialogue on migration in the framework of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward and by addressing the regional dimension of migration.

The climate-related security risks at play in Afghanistan include water shortages and droughts in the majority of provinces, with direct consequences for harvest and cattle, which in turn risks triggering and exacerbating local conflicts over land and water and increasing recruitment into armed groups. To make our peace efforts more efficient, we need adequate risk assessments in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our support to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission efforts aimed at providing further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions. I would also like to reconfirm that the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. The EU remains committed to working alongside UNAMA and international partners to achieve a democratic and self-sustainable Afghanistan.

I have personally been several times in Kabul and I sincerely hope that many kites will soon fly again in the beautiful sky of this city.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Cooreman (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union.

Like others, I would like to thank Representative Yamamoto for his briefing, but also for his tireless efforts towards lasting peace in Afghanistan. I also thank Commissioner Ghizaal Haress, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Yuri Fedotov, and His Excellency Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for their briefings.

I would like to highlight three points: the elections, the peace process, and the international community's support for Afghanistan.

First, Belgium congratulates the Afghan authorities and citizens on the parliamentary elections held on 20 October, which marked another important step in the consolidation of democracy in the country. It is now important to learn from these elections. The Afghan Government and institutions owe it to the courageous citizens to have orderly, inclusive and credible presidential elections in 2019. Electoral commissions must maintain their independence and carry out their mandates on the basis of experience they have acquired thus far.

In addition to addressing the serious security threat, logistical and technical problems must also be addressed and investment made in transparency and communication. The heinous attacks on schools and medical facilities in the pre-election period further remind us of the importance of full respect for international humanitarian law. In this regard, Belgium remains deeply concerned about the high number of civilian casualties and calls on all parties to protect the civilian population, in particular women and children.

My second point is on the peace process. The Kabul process must form the basis for a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process. Belgium calls on the Taliban leaders to respond to President Ghani's unprecedented peace offer and to engage in direct peace talks. The Afghan Government can already establish an inclusive and high-level negotiating team. The international community,

including regional actors, must support this process by acting in unison.

As the Council knows, Belgium attaches great importance to the role of women in peacebuilding. I am proud to announce a new Belgian contribution of €2 million to UN Women in Afghanistan to support the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). In this regard, we welcome the technical revision of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is currently under way. Belgium notes with concern shortcomings in the application of this law, such as the use — not provided for by the law — of mediation. We also encourage the Afghan Government to redouble its efforts to increase women's participation in public institutions.

Thirdly, Belgium joins in international support for peace and progress in Afghanistan. The success of the Geneva conference and the adoption of the resolution on Afghanistan at the General Assembly (resolution 73/88) demonstrate the willingness of the international community to unite to support progress, sustainable peace and development.

Belgium is an unconditional ally of Afghanistan through our membership in the European Union and NATO. We will substantially increase our contribution to the NATO mission and also contribute to the training of the Afghan National Army. We also support the humanitarian response to the drought through our contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund, which Belgium will increase considerably.

Let me conclude by paying tribute to the victims of violence in Afghanistan and the resilience of the Afghan people and security forces. The objective of peace is achievable in Afghanistan, and Belgium supports a peaceful settlement led and controlled by Afghans and will continue to support it in the future as well.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kyrgyzstan.

Mrs. Moldoisaeva (Kyrgyzstan): At the outset, let me thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ambassador Kairat Umarov, for their briefings today. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General and the recommendations contained therein (S/2018/1092).

We are emphasizing today the central and impartial role of the United Nations in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, expressing our appreciation and strong support for all of the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Afghanistan. The Kyrgyz Republic welcomes the adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, as reflected in the communiqué adopted at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan held on 27 and 28 November 2018.

We reiterate our serious concern about the security situation in Afghanistan. We wish to stress the need to continue addressing the threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan caused by region-based terrorist groups and other illegal armed groups and criminals. We call upon all States to strengthen their international and regional cooperation in enhancing information-sharing, border control, law enforcement and criminal justice.

The Kyrgyz Republic welcomes the steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to promote an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace through the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, including through the offer of unconditional talks, a temporary ceasefire and a request to the Taliban to respond to the call for peace from the Afghan people and their Government.

We welcome the achievements of the National Unity Government in political, economic, governance and social reforms and in the management of the transition. We further welcome the holding of parliamentary elections in October 2018, which marked another important step towards the consolidation of democracy in the country.

Kyrgyzstan considers Afghanistan to be a significant regional partner and attaches great importance to cooperation with Afghanistan in the implementation of regional projects, including the CASA-1000 energy project. That will contribute to the economic development of the country, as well as resolving a number of socioeconomic problems.

The Kyrgyz Republic is promoting an initiative to establish a trilateral agro-industrial consortium among Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. We also note that the education sector plays an important role in the process of restoring a peaceful

Afghanistan. In that regard, we express our readiness to consider the possibility of teaching Afghan students in our educational institutions, with financial support from foreign donors — countries and international organizations. Currently, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and its Afghan partners are implementing a pilot project to teach children from ethnic Kyrgyz families living in the Big and Little Pamir mountains of Afghanistan in educational institutions of Kyrgyzstan.

On 11 and 12 July, at the initiative of Kyrgyzstan, representatives of the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, UNAMA and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the issue of deepening cooperation between the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan was discussed. That included the establishment in Bishkek of an international centre for Afghan research and a regional cooperation platform for politicians, experts and scientists to discuss topical issues regarding Afghanistan's development and to prepare relevant recommendations, including on strengthening cooperation among the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we support the commitment of all Central Asian countries to joint long-term cooperation with Afghanistan. Together with our international partners, we are ready to fully cooperate in order to resolve the issues before us.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan, Ambassador Kairat Umarov of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, for their valuable briefings and input.

To promote its political-security conditions and socioeconomic development, Afghanistan needs sustained international support. From that perspective, the recent Geneva conference on Afghanistan demonstrated the international community's unwavering support for the country in its endeavour for peace, stability and prosperity.

In the political field, the holding of the parliamentary election was a successful development despite the security threats. It strengthened and will continue to further consolidate the foundations of democracy in the country. We congratulate Afghanistan on that achievement, which must be complemented by the presidential election in April 2019. Iran stands ready to extend all possible assistance for the successful holding of that election.

We also welcome the renewed efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Currently, there is a strong national, regional and global consensus that there is no military solution in that country. Therefore, the time is ripe for an inclusive political solution, which should be owned and led by the Afghan Government and people. The complementary Kabul, Tashkent and Moscow formats attest to that momentum, which must be seized. The international community should facilitate intra-Afghan dialogue and inclusive and comprehensive talks. Genuine strong international support and domestic and regional inclusion are the key to success.

Furthermore, in order to lead to a durable solution, such efforts need to take into account the underlying causes of instability and insecurity in the country over the past four decades. One such cause of instability is the presence of foreign forces, which has traditionally provided a recruiting ground for extremists. That is why we have never believed that such forces have contributed to Afghanistan's peace and stability. We therefore continue to urge that all foreign forces, regardless of their mandate and structure, be withdrawn from Afghanistan in a time-bound and responsible way. Instead of deploying foreign forces, every effort should be made to support and strengthen Afghanistan's military and security forces. That is one of the main requirements for the long-term stability of Afghanistan and should therefore be pursued as a high priority.

It is particularly essential to combat terrorist groups, such as Daesh, whose introduction into Afghanistan has led to increased bloodshed and dangerous sectarian tendencies. That alarming and horrific trend needs to be stopped before it reaches catastrophic proportions.

Since terrorism and drug trafficking have always been mutually reinforcing in Afghanistan, a two-pronged strategy to simultaneously fight drug trafficking and terrorism should be adopted. That is essential given the rise in terrorist activities, as well

as the fact that, according to the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, opium poppy cultivation is still at the second-highest level since 1994. At the same time, in order to fight the drug threat effectively, the international community should continue to support Afghanistan's economic development. In that regard, we will continue our assistance to promote Afghanistan's socioeconomic development. Currently, certain efforts are under way to ensure that such measures are carried out in a systematic and sustained manner.

We support the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and underline the need for a strong partnership between the United Nations agencies and the country.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming the resolve of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue their support to the fraternal people and the Government of Afghanistan in their search for peace and prosperity.

The meeting rose at 2 p.m.